

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

MARCH, 1927

Vol. XC

NUMBER 2

Helen the Hermit

A COMPLETE NOVEL—THIS CITY GIRL, CRAVING THE SIMPLE
LIFE AND A SOLITUDE IN WHICH TO INVITE
HER SOUL, TURNED TRUSTINGLY TO THE
QUIETUDE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

By Gertrude Pahlow

HELEN HOPE sat in her rose-and-gray boudoir, opening her morning mail. Subdued but incessant, the roar of the city poured in between the rose taffeta curtains; for the windows were open to let in the spring, and in New York you cannot filter the May breath from the racket.

The heavy paper of the expensive envelopes crackled as she tore one after another impatiently, and their contents rattled as she tossed them aside.

The telephone rang and rang within its rose taffeta frock; and each time the girl dropped the uncongenial letters to answer its unwelcome summons she murmured, under her breath, a word highly indicative of disapproval.

At last, in desperation, she banged down the windows, unhooked the telephone receiver, and swept all the letters into the wastebasket.

"What a life!" she cried aloud. "It's enough to make a lady bite her maiden aunt!"

To hear her speak in such forcible dispraise of her circumstances, you might have thought that Miss Hope's circumstances were those of a galley slave; that perhaps the envelopes contained *lettres-de-cachet* consigning her to prison, and the telephone calls were announcements of possible dates for her execution. But not so. She was merely paraphrasing Wordsworth, to the effect that the world is too much with us.

For poor Helen was that most devastating magnet, a young and lovely orphan with a private fortune, and these intrusions were all appeals for her to spread her much appreciated presence—already extended to tatters—over new areas.

"Five dinners, six luncheons, four dances, three week-ends, and two pro-

posals," she mused, "and I'm hardly out of bed. By night I'd be booked until the year after next. I believe all that racket out there is just people roaring, 'Helen, come on over!' or 'Helen, marry me!' If I listen to one more invitation, if I see one more man making sheep's-eyes at me, I'll be fit for a padded cell."

She pushed the waste basketful of undesired social amenities out of sight with her blue silk slipper, and picked up the morning newspaper. But she was not in a mood for news.

She skimmed the front page impatiently, rattled through an inner sheet or two, and gave up at sight of the editorials; and she was just about to toss the paper aside as she had the letters, when her eye was caught by a few words in small capitals at the top of the back page.

COMPLETE PRIVACY AND RETIREMENT

"Complete privacy and retirement," Helen repeated. "Why, that must mean heaven! There isn't such a thing anywhere else."

But as, fascinated, she pursued the subject into the ensuing small type, she discovered that what was being held out to her was not a dim hope, but an immediate actuality. There was a whole paragraph about it, all palpitant with promise. It follows:

Cabin on mountainside for rent, completely surrounded by woods. Rivers and lakes near by. Fishing, bathing, climbing. Absolute solitude. Meals furnished near by under refined conditions. Information on request. Apply Clericus, Manasquam 8800.

Helen sat staring at the advertisement for a full minute with wide, entranced eyes. It was so inspired as almost to be uncanny; it was as if her guiding star had swung out of its orbit and flung a brilliant beam directly in her path.

Bestirring herself, she pounced on the misused phone, restored it to its normal function, and urged its electrical tentacles forth in search of this celestial benefactor who called himself Clericus. After an interval—during which she waited breathless, foot tapping the floor in impatience—a small, mild, hesitating voice came back to her along the miles of singing wire.

Clericus, who, it seemed, in private life was the Rev. Jarvis Agnew, retired from active ministry on account of impaired health, was wholly amenable. He had the

very lodge in the wilderness for which the girl's soul sighed.

A train desirous of bearing her thither left the Grand Central Station at ten thirty. He would meet her at the mountain station with his Ford. His wife would purvey the refined nourishment mentioned in the advertisement.

Helen Hope was never one of those who are in danger of being lost through hesitation. She announced that she was on her way, hung up the receiver, summoned her companion and her maid, and began to shed the silken garments of the boudoir like a bird in a hurry to have done with the moulting season.

"I'm taking to the woods, Poly," she said to Mrs. Poulson, her duenna and slave. "Answer all those invitations in the wastebasket, will you, and say no to everything? Say no to the telephone, too, no matter who calls or what they want. And say I'll be gone all summer, and maybe longer."

"But, child, you can't do that!" Mrs. Poulson protested. "Why, Major Perrine is coming to call this afternoon, and I think he's going to propose!"

"Say no to him also."

"And there's the Livingstons' dinner tonight, and the Blakeney's house party tomorrow, and the—"

"Say no to them all; tell them I've got chicken pox or something, or hire somebody to double for me," Helen interrupted. "I've quit cold on the whole business. I'm going to where I won't hear an invitation, or even see a man. Annette, please pack me a couple of bags—just some heavy boots and a soft felt hat and plenty of silk shirts and knickers. No evening clothes. I tell you I'm taking to a hermitage!"

Her satellites shook their heads and wrung their hands, but, as usual, hastened to do their young mistress's bidding. In a couple of trices she was ready—trig blue suit, knowing little blue hat, shining blue eyes, shining black bags and all.

The taxi stood chugging at the door. She snatched up her gloves, and threw a jubilant kiss over her shoulder.

"Good-by, dears!" she cried. "I'm off to find what the hymn tells about, what I've never had since I had the measles—peace, perfect peace!"

II

"Now," said Clericus, stopping the aged flivver and helping Helen out in his cour-

teous, modest way, "h-here we are, in our woodland w-wilds. Our Eden, M-Mrs. Agnew and I call it. M-mind the hole."

Helen stepped over the woodchuck den into which she had nearly alighted, shook the wrinkles out of her bones, and looked about. She was stiff from the long railroad journey, and bruised from bumping over the mountain roads, and a trifle weary of the mild prattle of Clericus, which was so high-minded as to be almost devoid of flavor.

But when she saw the deep ravine, the pine-clad slope, the little brown cabin snug-gled among the trees, all her fatigues were banished by elation. This was the refuge for which she had been pining, longer, she now realized, than she had known; all her life, perhaps.

"Oh-h!" she exclaimed, with a long breath. "It's absolutely perfect!"

"It is, indeed, a p-pleasant sylvan n-nook," acquiesced the Rev. Jarvis Agnew. "We bought it, after my b-break-down, from a club of city people who arranged it for a summer r-retreat, but found it too r-remote and r-retired for their r-restless spirits. The c-cabins are sc-cattered about among the woods. The c-clubhouse, which we c-call the h-home, is reached by this p-path. There we live 'with m-malice toward none, with ch-charity for all'—as the Good Book so b-beautifully says."

"And I shall be all alone?" Helen gazed gloatingly up at her tiny home, hidden like a bird's nest in its greenery. Her mind was so intent on solitude that it failed to register the reverend gentleman's mistake in ascribing Abraham Lincoln's famous phrase to the Bible.

"Absolutely. Shall I sh-show you the w-way to the main c-cabin, where you will receive your s-sustenance?"

"Oh, no, thank you, not just now," Helen said quickly. She was eager to begin savoring her solitude; and while Clericus could not be called society—indeed, with his mild manner, his hesitating speech, and his eyes, which overstudy had weakened, concealed behind dark glasses, he hardly seemed wholly present—yet even he was one too many. "I think I'll go right up to my perch," she added. "I'm rather tired."

The Rev. Jarvis Agnew bowed in his acquiescent, self-effacing way, and, picking up her bags, preceded her up the narrow trail. It was a hard path to negotiate,

steeply sloping and slippery with pine needles, and Helen skidded helplessly in her thin city shoes.

Her guide scrambled up like a cat, his worn clerical coat flapping behind him with the briskness of his movement. Moreover, when he observed her difficulty he took the two bags in one hand and hauled her with the other. She noted that he was surprisingly muscular for so spiritual a person.

Arrived at the tiny porch, he deposited her and her bags, opened the door, and made another of his deprecatory bows.

"I l-leave you here," he said, "to r-rest and invite your s-soul, as Mrs. Agnew and I say. D-dinner is at six thirty."

Helen stood and looked about her domain. The woods crowded up to her very door, the pine boughs brushed her roof. Between the tall boles she could look out across a green valley, with a blue lake in its midst, at distant tree clad mountains.

There was no sound when the light foot-fall of Clericus had died away, but the chatter of disturbed chipmunks and the murmur of a little river down in the ravine. It was like the lovely unmolested peace of the first garden in the world; there was something deliciously primal about it, as if it had been created for her alone.

Helen gave a great sigh of contentment. The knots which all the hurried months just past had tied in her nerves began to loosen, and already she felt soothed. It seemed impossible that New York, with all its myriad violences, could be part of the same sphere as this green peace.

"Peace, perfect peace," she thought, quoting the hymn again, "but this is a hundred times better than heaven. I shall never leave this spot, never."

Inside the house her satisfaction increased. The living room was brown and bare; its walls were rough wood like its exterior, it had a deep fireplace with a mantel, a small table, two rocking-chairs, two candles, and nothing else at all. It smelled of cedarwood.

Off the end of it opened a tiny bedroom, with a cot, a straight chair, a canvas-covered wardrobe, and a grocery box table.

The girl gazed at this ensemble with rapture. Nothing could be more unlike the smother of silk and cushions in which she lived at home. She saw life stretching before her in naturalness, solitary; no telephone, no invitations, and, above all, no men—and she exulted.

The next thing was to remove her city raiment, and with it her jaded city self. Singing happily, she unpacked her bags and clad herself for the simple life.

She was one of those wise virgins who let nature set the palette for their attire; and when she had finished dressing, she looked—with her blue silk shirt and blue soft hat that deepened the blue of her eyes, and her knickers and tie that blended with the brown of her hair—like a sophisticated wood nymph.

A faint pang of regret assailed her, as she glanced into the mirror, that there was no one to see so well conceived a picture; but, after all, that was her chief reason for thanksgiving.

Her heavy boots, meant for tramping, inspired her to activity, and she set forth to explore the woods. Spring, already dusty and jaded in the city, was here as fresh as sunrise.

Anemones swayed lightly on their delicate stems; the Indian pipe—that poets call the ghost flower—sprang waxen and aloof from the pine needles, and where the sunlight lay in warm splashes the pure white of bloodroot rose eagerly to greet it.

Helen loved the lovely things too much to gather them. She leaned over and touched their leaves lightly, and crooned to them, and went on her way.

Presently she came to a jumping off place, the deep cleft of the ravine where she had heard the brook prattling. The pines marched down it on the hither side, and beyond the brown water they marched up again to a high summit.

There was a trail wandering up this slope, beckoning to loftier and still lovelier places, and suddenly she wanted very much to follow it. She loved climbing for its own vigorous sake, and for the sake of the top-of-the-world feeling that comes at the end of the climb, when you sit looking out across the tree tops, and the kingdoms of the earth are spread out before you. So she decided to cross the ravine and climb now.

The stream was full of spring energy; it foamed and tumbled violently, tossing up its spray. It was certainly too turbulent to negotiate at this level. She began to scramble up the rough gorge, clambering over boulders, and looking for a safe and shallow place.

The girl came to a place where the hill rested a moment, and the ravine widened out into a ledge. Here the stream rested,

too, or at least paused for breath as she herself was doing, and lay in a boiling, churning pool around the rocks that lifted their heads above its welter.

Here, thought Helen, was the place. She took careful observations, to chart her course.

The rocks were scattered and slippery, but one could step from this one to that one, and jump from that to the next. She leaped to her first stepping-stone, and stood balanced.

The next stone did not look quite so practicable as it had from the bank. It was farther away than she had thought, and more slippery looking.

Helen, although a good outdoors woman, had an indoors weakness; she hated wet feet as strongly as does a cat. She stood and looked at the stone with deep distrust, and it was only by forcible urging that she spurred herself to the jump. Reaching her goal by the narrowest margin, she staggered, caught her balance, and stood quivering.

The next jump was still worse. Here in the middle the water had worn a channel dark and deep. She had already found her enterprise dangerous, and that next stone looked entirely inadequate for a rather uncertain lady jumper to alight on.

It was pointed, oozy with brown slime, planted in the midst of a swirl of angry water—a very Judas of a stepping-stone—and she was precariously balanced on a wretched little splinter that would not give a good take-off to a fly.

Panic seized her. She looked back, but the jump she had just taken was nearly as bad as the one that awaited her. She looked forward again over the foam-flecked water, and a horrible moment of paralysis, when it seemed that the spirit was utterly powerless to coerce the rebellious flesh, held her tight.

"Oh!" she cried aloud. "What shall I do?"

"Jump, of course!" a masculine voice answered from the farther bank.

She looked up with such a start that she nearly toppled into the water, and saw herself confronted by a tall, vigorous young man, dressed forest fashion in corduroys and heavy boots. He was pushing a lock of dark hair back from his forehead and contemplating her with hostile dark eyes.

"I c-can't," she declared tremulously. "I'm p-petrified!"

"Umph!" grunted the young man in a tone of contempt. "All right, I'll give you a hand."

Taking a step or two into the water, he held out to her a large sturdy brown paw.

"Come on," he commanded, with the effect of an unspoken "confound you!"

Helen put her hand in his, he gave a little pull, and she went over as quickly and lightly as a bird. She was astonished; there was nothing to it, after all.

She balanced an instant on the slippery stone, yielded again to the pull of the strong brown hand, and took another flight. And there she was, on the bank, almost in his very arms.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "I didn't know it was so easy!"

"Nothing easier," returned her rescuer.

"I think I rather—lost my nerve," explained Helen.

"It's a common tendency," remarked the young man grumpily.

His gruff voice, grumbling hostilely against her ear, brought her suddenly to self-consciousness. She straightened her back and detached her hand from his.

How annoying—she realized abruptly—to run into a man in this supposedly virgin solitude! Still, if he hadn't materialized, she probably would have stayed balancing on that rock for the rest of the summer. One could certainly do no less than thank him.

"I'm very much obliged to you for salvaging me," she said warmly.

"Don't mention it," he grunted.

His brusqueness puzzled her, for it was a quality to which her dealings with the male sex had left her unaccustomed. He was shy by nature, she thought, or embarrassed at being brought so unexpectedly into close contact with a strange girl.

While his presence was most unwelcome to her, her social training was too deeply ingrained to permit a moment of constraint to pass unredeemed. She began to talk, charmingly and without significance, as if she were in a drawing-room.

"It's amazing how helpless you feel when you don't know what to do, isn't it?" Helen remarked. "I remember one time when I was on a runaway horse. I didn't know whether to sit tight and let him take me wherever he was going, or shout for somebody to persuade him to go where I was going, or—"

She broke off. Without apology, with-

out explanation, without farewell, without a vestige of social amenity except a muttered phrase, "Footbridge farther down," the young man had turned on his heel and departed.

For a minute she stood staring after his tall, broad back as it moved up the slope, along the path she had meant to follow. For a minute more she listened to the firm tread of his large feet on the crackling twigs. Then he was gone from sight and hearing, as if he had never been.

"Well!" said Helen. "Well, of all the—"

Words failed her; she was not an accomplished swearer, and all ordinary modes of expression seemed completely inadequate. However, she tried again.

"Boor!" she said; and also, with emphasis, "Brute! Monster!"

But it was no use; she simply did not know the words to express, with accuracy, her state of mind. It is a trying situation to have a person to whom you are trying to convey the information that his company is not desired, and that you are about to leave him, convey the same information and take the same action first.

Since the unspeakable young man had gone up, Helen immediately began to go down. As she went, she talked to herself in a breathless, indignant undertone.

"As if I wanted to interfere with the brute! *All I want is peace.* Only *tried* to speak to him out of *decency.* Never heard of anything *like* it! Wish I'd *stayed* in the middle of the stream! He's an oaf, if that means what I think it does!"

However, mention of the stream reminded her that she must cross it again, for she had lost her ambition to climb, and now desired nothing but to get home. It grew more and more turbulent, and uneasiness began to interfere with her indignation.

"Footbridge farther down," the brute had said. He did have a redeeming instinct or so; he had troubled himself to remember that she must get back.

Even the lowest criminals, it is said, have a lingering spark of our common humanity. Helen ceased to murmur vindictively, although she still scowled at the dark water as she watched for the bridge.

She had gone some distance before she found it; and it was nothing to write home about—just a single plank, none too securely stayed at the ends, and sagging unpleasantly in the middle. She did not feel

much more drawn to it than she had to the stepping-stones.

She took a long breath as she embarked upon the passage; and when she reached the middle of the stream, where the narrow, slippery board settled under her weight to the very surface of the water, she was near to losing her nerve again. But the memory of the young man's contemptuous voice saying, "It's a common tendency," steadied her, and she finished the journey successfully.

Following the broad path that Clericus had pointed out to her, she went at the brisk pace of righteous rage to the clubhouse. Here she found her host rocking, smoking, and reading an illustrated paper on the veranda. His face lighted with pastoral pleasure at sight of her.

"Well, Miss H-Hope!" he said. "You come into our w-wilderness like a breath of your n-name. I trust you are h-happy h-here?"

"I'd be happier, Mr. Agnew," said Helen forthrightly, "if I hadn't just had a disappointment. I thought you told me this was a solitude."

A slight uneasiness stole across the guileless face of the clergyman.

"Er—w-what makes you think it is n-not?" he asked.

"Why, I just ran into a man—a horrible, insufferable man—on the mountain-side. What's he doing here?"

The Rev. Mr. Agnew's face cleared, and he laughed gently but heartily.

"You needn't w-worry about that young man! He's j-just as anxious to avoid s-so-ciety as you are. He's a wr-writer. He's wr-riting a book that he has to f-finish at a special time, and he doesn't want to sp-peak to any one—particularly young ladies. He r-remarked as much when I t-told him you were coming."

"Mr. Agnew!" Helen exclaimed, with sudden suspicion. "Did you give him to understand, as you did me, that he would be the only person here?"

Mr. Agnew's candid face looked deprecating again:

"Well, he d-does seem to have received that imp-pression. But I didn't intend to g-give it to him, nor to you, Miss H-Hope. I only meant you'd be alone in your c-cabin. You understand, Miss H-Hope, I had to p-purchase this entire p-property; it was a great strain for a p-poor man like me, and I couldn't afford to l-limit myself

to just one g-guest. There is no one so p-poorly p-paid as ministers of the g-gospel."

He said this so patiently and sadly, his coat looked so shabby, his square-toed shoes so respectable and resigned, that Helen was ashamed.

"I understand," she said gently. "I'm sorry I was cross. But if it isn't too much trouble, Mr. Agnew, I'll take my dinner a little early. I don't want to run any risk of meeting that man."

"Oh, no d-danger of that, Miss H-Hope!" Clericus reassured her with a smile. "Not f-five minutes ago, he c-came to say he'd take his d-dinner very l-late."

For some unaccountable reason this considerate conduct made Helen's cheeks blaze with fury.

"He did, did he!" she cried in a tense voice. "Well, he needn't bother! Please give me a chop or something in a basket, Mr. Agnew. I'm going to cook my dinner in my cabin."

"Oh, Miss H-Hope—that—that—surely is t-too m-much!" Clericus protested.

"It surely isn't," Helen said, breathing very fast. "It's hardly enough. Give me some breakfast, too, please. I'm going to make certain—positively, absolutely certain—that I never set eyes on that odious person again!"

III

THE morning streamed deliciously into the little room, dappled with dancing leaf shadows, aromatic with pine scent, audible with bird song. Helen jumped up and ran to the window to greet it.

There is no morning like a May morning on a wooded mountainside; the very freshness of the beginning of life is in it. She felt as young as the youngest chickadee chirping on a pine bough.

She bathed in soft, amber rain water from the barrel by the door, dressed in her woodland garments, and set about getting her breakfast. The long night of unbroken sleep had made her over, and she moved with an enthusiasm to which she had been long a stranger, singing as she worked.

To rise from bed right into the forest morning, to bathe in water straight from the sky, to cook over wood that grew at the very door—that was the real Arcadian life. So Rosalind must have lived in the Forest of Arden. So Helen hoped to live always.

Before long, however, she began to feel that if even this life were Arcadian, it was not that of a lotus-eater. When she fended for herself last night, the fire had been already laid, the spring water already brought; but this morning she had to fetch the wood and find the spring and lug the heavy pail herself.

Last night's cookery, too, had been easy—a piece of steak and a cut-up boiled potato in a frying pan. To-day's nursing of ice cold water on an unstable bed of twigs until it could be evolved into cereal and coffee demanded reserves of patience and finesse on which she had never before had occasion to draw.

The bread she was trying to toast fell into the fire. The coffeepot upset and poured most of its contents on the uncertain flames.

She had intended to gather wild flowers to grace her breakfast table, to lure the wild birds, with crumbs, to the repast. But long before it was ready she was too depleted for æsthetic considerations; and she was thankful, when at last it became possible, to sit down at a bare board and devour gummy oatmeal direct from the pan.

Tidying up, too, proved a complicated task. She didn't mind making up the little bed, or sweeping the floor with the twig broom; but the fire had gone out after the coffee douche, and to get more wood and make another would take half the morning.

The alternative was to wash the sticky dishes in cold water, a task which even a graduate dishwasher will admit is not appealing. Altogether, by the time the girl had finished her labors, not only was the morning well advanced, but both she and the world seemed several years older than when they had greeted it together at sunrise.

Helen felt that it was high time for her to take Clericus's advice, to rest—for which she was quite ready—and to invite her soul. She would go to the clubhouse, she decided, ask for a snack and a book, and spend the day in the high woods with the birds and the chipmunks.

She had taken the precaution, the day before, to inquire the location of the intolerable author's cabin. She now scouted stealthily about it, on her way to the clubhouse, to make sure that he was safely inside.

There could be no doubt of his loca-

tion. A thin waft of tobacco smoke trailed out of the window, she could hear the patter of a typewriter, and in a pause of its activities she thought she could distinguish low but heartfelt cursing.

No danger of colliding with him again, then. She could go on her way with a free mind.

The Rev. Mr. Agnew was rocking on his porch, as before, with an illustrated paper in his hand.

"Good day, Miss H-Hope!" he said genially. "Bright as the m-morning, eh? Did you change your m-mind and come for b-breakfast?"

"Oh, no, I had breakfast hours ago," she replied blithely. "I came to ask Mrs. Agnew for a couple of sandwiches and a book, so I can spend the day in the woods. Shall I go in this way?"

Clericus jumped up so hastily that his rocking-chair oscillated as if in panic.

"No, Miss H-Hope—n-no, I don't think that would be advisable! Mrs. Agnew is busy—our l-limited means compel us to do without a s-servant—and I think she is in what might be called d-dishabille. If you'll excuse me, I'll s-see about it."

He disappeared within the house, and in a moment Helen heard voices, from somewhere at the rear, upraised in a brisk interchange. Something about them suggested heat, even acrimony. She could not hear the words, but feared from the tone that her request had given rise to a domestic crisis.

Distressed, she started inside to withdraw it, but when she had crossed the threshold, she was halted by the thought that her appearance at such a moment of tension would embarrass the worthy couple cruelly, and that it would be the part of tact to ignore the situation she had created. So she stopped inside the main room, and, shoving a chair about a little to indicate her presence, busied herself with looking for a book.

The room was large and primitive, roughly sheathed in bark, furnished with a long pine dining table and a quantity of rustic chairs. She looked all about it for the library without success. There was not a book in sight.

Presently, while she was still wondering where they had concealed the appurtenances of a learned profession, the door at the back of the room opened, and Clericus entered, bearing a small, hastily wrapped

parcel suggestive of masculine workmanship. He looked a little flustered, and she feared he had had to make the sandwiches himself.

"Oh, thank you! I hope it wasn't too troublesome a time to ask," she said. Then, fearing that this remark had been tactless, she hastened to add: "And speaking of time, what time is it? I forgot to wind my watch last night."

"I can t-tell you to the s-second," answered Clericus proudly; and he fished from the pocket of his clerical waistcoat one of those humble watches that made the dollar famous. "Nine forty-three, exactly. Old F-Faithful—that's what I call my t-timepiece—never loses a t-tick."

Helen fished, too, in the breast pocket of her silk shirt, and drew out a dainty disk of platinum and diamonds, which she proceeded to set from her host's battered nickel-plated sun regulator. The contrast between the two watches was so marked as to be ironical.

The girl was embarrassed when she saw that it had not failed to register with poor Clericus, for she saw him look wistfully at the jeweled toy. She put her timepiece back hastily.

"And now, if I had a book, I'd be ready for anything—even a desert island," she said. "Will you show me where to find one?"

"Oh, a b-book," returned Clericus. "Well, the fact is, Miss H-Hope, I—we—h-haven't any b-books here. We took the place j-just as it was, you see; d-didn't bring our library, or, in f-fact, anything, you might say, but our h-hats. But look through these p-papers; you'll find s-some of them very interesting."

Helen glanced at the tabloid newspapers. "I don't believe I care for them, thank you," she said.

"Oh, l-look them over," urged her host. "You're sure to find s-something you'll like. S-step over here."

He was untiring in his zeal, poor, kindly soul; paper after paper he spread out before her, or pressed into her hands. The presentments of Beautiful Dancer's Legs Insured for One Million Dollars; of Heiress Sues Chauffeur Mate; of Man Packs Body of Sweetheart in Furnace, all left her cold. She thanked him for his kind intentions, and set forth unencumbered for her adventure into solitude.

There were paths leading in all direc-

tions from the clubhouse to the highway, to the farmhouse which yielded daily supplies, to the cabins hiding among the trees, to the heights. Looking for the wildest and loneliest, Helen discovered a faint trail that took its almost indiscernible way into the deep woods at the north.

It was a lovely path; ferns fringed it, filtered sunshine checkered it; it led the eye on and on into green depths that promised primitive, untroubled peace, mounting as it went. The joy of the morning revived in her as she turned toward it; it was a path to dream about.

She sang as she entered upon it. The Rev. Mr. Agnew, oscillating again in his rocking-chair, looked after her with a clerically appreciative eye.

Presently the path made a turn and attacked a ridge that was too steep for singing. Here no one had passed for a long time; the footing was rough and treacherous, and soon the trail disappeared beneath masses of laurel and tangles of bittersweet.

She breasted it in silence. It was a hard struggle; the stones betrayed her feet, the tough growth contested every inch; but she was piqued by the challenge of it, and intrigued by the thought of the untouched remoteness of which it was the safeguard and guarantee.

She fought with hands and feet, scrambled and slipped and scrambled up again. At last, breathless, she reached the top, and stood to look down upon her newly conquered kingdom.

It was even better than she had hoped. Below her lay a deep hollow, margined by rocks and greenery, and holding in its cup a mountain tarn which gave back the cloudless sky like Eve's own mirror, clear, untarnished, and virgin. Around it the pines stood sentinel; above it was nothing but blue space and a single, high-soaring bird.

Lovely words jumbled through her mind as she gazed at it: "A savage spot, a lonely and enchanted—" "Here are cool waters deep, and through the moss the ivies creep, and in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep—" "Perilous seas in fairylands—"

She stood a moment in ecstasy, and then flung herself recklessly down the slope for a more intimate knowledge. This was what she had longed for and—

"My Gawd, deary!" exclaimed a voice just below her. "How you made me jump!"

Helen jumped herself; indeed, balanced as she was on a bowlder, she nearly leaped forthwith into the lake. If she had looked for any voice in this untouched wilderness, it would have been for the silver voice of a dryad; but this was the brassy twang of lower Broadway.

Recapturing her balance, she peered down, in dismay, to discover the author of the shock. She had not far to seek; just below her bowlder, on the edge of the lake, half sat and half reclined a lady.

The lady was well built to recline on a rocky shore, and in addition to the generous provisions of nature, she had brought along several thick pillows, from which she bulged like a queen billow among lesser swells. Her face was chalkily pink, her raiment a kimono of the same rosy hue, and both gave the impression of being slightly soiled and greatly tolerant.

But all other details of her appearance shrank into insignificance beside the startling spectacle of her hair, which, loosened and streaming in all directions, began as a demure mouse-colored cloud around her large pink face, and about two inches away burst suddenly into a halo of the most glittering and effulgent gold.

Helen's astonishment and chagrin at this apparition was so great that she was deprived of speech. But that didn't matter; the pink and gold lady had enough for two.

"My Gawd, deary," she began again with mild reproach, "you scared me fit to make my bridge work fall out. When you're gonna crash in on anybody like that, you'd oughta holler; it's only manners."

"I—I didn't know there was any one here," stammered Helen. "How—how did you get here? You never clambered over that ridge?"

The lady laughed good-naturedly.

"I'll tell the world I didn't! Whadja take me for, deary, a human fly? I came right outa the back door o' my little house, easy as molasses candy."

Helen looked around and saw, to her increased surprise, that from the southern end of the lake a broad path led by a gentle gradient to another of the little brown cabins. Alas for the rôle of Balboa! She had only taken the longest and most difficult route to an easily accessible spot.

"Oh!" she said feebly. "I didn't know there was another path. But—but how did you happen to come to this place at

all? It's not—not the kind of place you like best, is it?"

"My gosh, no! Wait till you been here awhile. It's the last place the Lord ever made; I been here three days without seein' as much as a dog fight. I guess whoever planned this burg had sleepin' sickness. No, I never come here for fun. Come on down, deary, an' I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh—thank you—I don't believe I have time to-day. I—I'm in rather a hurry."

"Oh, so's your old man!" countered the lady affably. "What you in a hurry for—to see the sunset? That's the only show there is around here. Come on, deary, be clubby. I ain't had a soul to talk to to-day; there ain't anything round except the old minister buck an' the author, and he keeps away from me like I was a leopard or somethin' else catchin'."

Vainly hunting for excuses, Helen descended slowly. She was trapped, and she knew it. The difficulty about a wilderness is that there are no alibis hardy enough to live in its crude and simple air. She only hoped that the pink lady's breath would give out soon.

"Siddown here," said the lady, generously pulling out one of the dingy silk billows from beneath her ample form and shoving it toward Helen. "My, that's a cute bob you got. Cute knickers, too. I used to look swell in knickers; my legs are lovely; but they make 'em so much smaller around the waist lately, I can't seem to get none to fit. Well, you wanted to hear all about it, didn'tja? It's quite a story."

"Oh—don't bother to tell me everything," protested Helen hastily. "I shouldn't think of intruding on your private affairs, a total stranger like me."

"Oh, you don't seem like a stranger to me, deary," the lady reassured her affably. "The minute I seen you, I felt like I'd known you forever; an' then here we are, the only girls in this Gawd-forsaken place; an', as I always say, us girls gotta hang together. If all girls done that, I wouldn't be here now. I'm gonna tell you. Comfy, deary? Well—"

She fixed Helen with an eye that, although not glittering, was as determined and inescapable as the Ancient Mariner's, and began the Odyssey of the tangled affairs of her heart.

Helen sat hypnotized and helpless.

Sometimes she listened to the tale; sometimes it beat unheeded on her dulled eardrums, but always it went on and on and on, like a steady rainstorm, like a waterfall.

"So I says to Fred—that was my second—I says: 'You seem to get awful het up if I ever mention Eddie'—that was my first—I says; 'but what about me listenin' all the time to all this dope about your Florrie?'—that was this blond chorine I was tellin' you about.

"'You're all the time droolin' about the cute things she says,' I says, 'an' I'll tell the world I've heard a cuckoo clock talk cuter, too,' I says; 'but ja ever hear me answer back one word, or even tell you to please hang up? No,' I says, 'I'm too much the lady. An' I think,' I says, 'you might try to be enough the gentleman to let me open my trap once in awhile an' get a word in edgeways!'

"Well—what he says in reply simply couldn't be repeated, deary, by one refined girl to another. So I just put on my hat an' went right out to see Eddie. He was workin' in Gubbel's, in the neckties. Eddie's a swell dresser, he looked elegant with all them lovely silks hangin' in front of his map, an' I says to him—"

Helen thought, with a sudden longing, of mornings in New York. Of course the telephone did ring, but one could always silence it by taking off the receiver. And of course people did come in, but then one could always have an engagement and go out.

While here—poor wedding guest! She might beat her breast until it caved in, but there was no possible avenue of escape. Her weary mind gazed down hopeless interminable vistas of life history; and the sun shone, and the pine tops waved, and the vocal waterfall trickled on and on.

When next she came back to her surroundings she saw that she had missed a chapter. The plot had thickened, and the epic now dealt with the remarkable variegated hair.

"So, when I looked in the glass, after they'd finished puttin' on the blonde stuff, right off my heart begun to feel like a watermelon. The beauty shop girl, she looked at me, an' she says, 'My Gawd, deary, you look swell!' An' all the others come in—even the madam—an' they all says the same.

"But I never says a word—not a word.

I never can speak my feelin's; I just dry right up. I laid down my money—five bucks—just like that, an' walked out. An' when I got home, Fred—that's my second—he was in the dinin' room, shakin' up a cocktail.

"I went in the bedroom an' took my hat off, an' put a little powder on the old beezzer, an' my hand was tremblin' like a leaf. Then I went in to face him. 'Well,' I says, 'whadja think of it? I done it for you,' I says.

"Well, deary, right there was where I rung the wrong bell. Lemme tell you somethin'; when you get married, if you got anythin' to break to your husband, you break it after he's took a drink an' not before. Gawd knows, I'd oughta known better; I've had experience enough.

"But, anyway, Fred just took one look at me, an' he says, 'I think it looks like hell,' he says. Well, that was enough for me—after all I'd suffered, an' payin' five bucks an' all.

"Is that so?' I says. 'You think so, do you?' I says. 'You talk till you wear out your adenoids,' I says, 'tellin' me all about how cute your Florrie looks since she done her hair blond,' I says, 'an' then, when your own wedded wife does the same just to please you, you say she looks like hell,' I says. 'My Gawd,' I says, 'is there any justice in this land?'

"Gosh, you'd oughta heard me, deary! If I do say it, I talked just like a book."

Helen watched a chipmunk scampering up and down a neighboring beech tree, sitting still a minute to nibble some invisible refreshment, and then flinging himself in a burst of exuberance from one branch to another. Free—the chipmunk was free!

She looked at him as a convict may look out between prison bars at the son of liberty walking in the sunshine. The lake lay shining blue under the clear sky; beyond it, the shadowy tree aisles seduced the eye to the loveliest altitudes; and here she sat, a bond slave to untiring eloquence.

She cast a hunted look around her for some avenue of escape. There was no one in the world to call her; hardly a chance of a fire or any other alarm; not even the oft-cursed distraction of the telephone.

But self-preservation remains the first law of life. She began to struggle to her feet—both of which, like her intelligence, had gone to sleep—and looked up at the bank down which she had come.

"Here, where you goin'?" the pink lady protested. "I ain't near through. What makes you so restless, deary? Siddown. Take another pillow. Gosh, ain't it a comfort to have a real good talk! I feel better'n I have any time since I hit this dump. Siddown, deary. I'm tellin' you."

Helen sank back despairingly. Short of the most desperate measures—short of rudeness like the unspeakable young writer man's, or drowning this lady in the lake—there was no escape.

She sat dull and helpless, and the merciless tide rolled over her—splashes of Eddie, jets of Fred, billows of Florrie, the fresh wise-cracker, tidal waves of Percy, the new boy friend, with his cute sayings and his loose roll and his elegant taste in hooch—Eddie—Fred—Florrie—Percy—

However, it is always darkest before dawn; and presently relief came in sight from the most unexpected quarter. The sun was high and hot, the quiet lake gave back its warmth in a brilliant dazzle; the air had a drowsy buzz.

The Odyssey faltered, interrupted by a yawn; continued, and was interrupted again. The narrator kept on heroically, but suddenly she was overtaken and nearly rent asunder by the great-grandfather of all yawns. She had two gold crowns at the back of the upper jaw, and one wisdom tooth missing.

When she had, with an effort, reunited the dislocated segments of her face, she suddenly displayed the wisdom to recognize defeat and the courage to admit it.

"An' so," she said, accelerating slightly, like one finishing a bedtime story to sign off at the appointed moment, "when I seen how it read 'Complete Retirement,' I thought; that's me all over, Mabel! By the time the old shrubbery's growed out enough to get all the brown part into a good boyish bob, I'll have my decree, an' then I can step out high, wide and han'-some."

"Well—ho-um! I'm feelin' a little tired now—I didn't scarcely sleep a wink last night—an' if you'll excuse me, deary, I think I'll just douse the old glims a jiff or two."

Helen jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, shoved the spare pillow under the nodding head, and scrambled into motion before the lady should have time to change her mind. But she need not have worried.

Before she could reach the end of the little lake a louder note had been added to the sawing drone of the insect world. The large pink mouth had fallen open, and one of the gold crowns gleamed again.

Helen hurried up the slope of the mountain at a rapid pace, scrambling over boulders, straddling fallen tree trunks, worming through thickets, in a panic desire to leave the infested glen behind. This encounter had shaken her.

The monologue of Mrs. Rosalie Erroll—such was indeed the lady's name, or the name she was proffering to her social connection—had peopled the mountainside with denizens of Broadway. Her Jockey Club scent seemed to spread in waves through the forest aisles, overwhelming the perfume of the pines; she was as pervasive as a flu epidemic.

Helen kept glancing over her shoulder as though she expected to see the lady bounding and panting along the rough trail behind her.

"Come, pull yourself together, woman!" she admonished herself. "She can't follow you here. There's nobody who can possibly bother you now. Take it easy, Eliza. The bloodhounds have lost your trail!"

Yet she still kept seeking anxiously for an even safer solitude. Not once, as yet, had she been able to invite her soul, and she was afraid her soul would be offended and refuse the invitation if it were too long delayed.

Presently, when she had been climbing for some minutes, the woods opened out on a place where the mountain arose abruptly in a wall of rock. As she looked up she saw, a little way above, a dark aperture piercing the gray expanse.

A cave—a cave in a lonely mountain-side! Why, that was such a spot as hermits cry for; the spot of all others for perfect solitude.

She clambered, with some effort, up the steeply slanting face of the rock, and stood on the threshold of the cave, rejoicing.

"There!" she said aloud. "'Alone at last!'"

"Er—beg pardon!" a startled but suave voice remarked within the dark hollow. "Were you addressing me?"

A tall, middle-aged, slightly stooping man of scholarly aspect came forward into the doorway.

Helen clutched at a point of rock to keep from falling backward with the shock of

her surprise. It was all very well to find sermons in stones, she thought fleetingly, but you didn't expect to find the preacher, too.

"N-no—I—I didn't know you were there!" she gasped. "Where—where did you come from?"

"I am about to become a resident of the Rev. Mr. Agnew's camp," returned the caveman, in a polished, slightly pedantic manner. "I came to investigate the rock formations of this district. I am a specialist in geology; I might say a scholar."

He might, indeed, say a scholar. Never before was there a scholar of such scholarly appearance; he wore scholarship as a mantle. His coat was long and dark, his tie intellectual and stringy; his spectacles had gold bows and dark rims, and his graying hair was brushed back in a manner that almost made cerebration visible.

Helen had met several savants, and they all looked just like ordinary men; but you would know this one for a scholar if you met him in the dark.

Helen blinked in consternation.

"When did you come?" she asked faintly.

"This morning. I observed the advertisement in yesterday's newspaper, and came last night to the adjacent village of Clapham, whence I proceeded by motor vehicle this morning. I find the locality well adapted for my researches, and shall remain here."

Helen stood silent. Of course you couldn't blame Clericus for continuing to advertise; he needed the money, poor man; but could you call this solitude?

She began to wonder how many cabins the camp comprised. Evidently the population was to be limited only by their number.

"Well," she said lamely, at last, "it's a beautiful place."

"The more so since you appeared in it," he replied with a macabre gallantry that reminded her somehow of the wolf playing Little Red Riding-hood's grandmother. "And what was the occasion of your coming, madam?"

"I came because I wanted to be alone," Helen said, but, fearing that the answer sounded brusque, she softened it with a smile.

Helen's smile was a potent one, even when she was not flushed and bright with the tingle of mountain exercise; and now

it exercised an instant, disintegrating effect on the scholarly polish.

"Ah, guess again!" said the geologist, his eyes beginning to gleam through his intellectual spectacles. "A pretty girl like you doesn't want to be alone. Go it while you're young is my motto!"

Something about this suggestion struck Helen's ear unpleasingly; it seemed to accord ill with the scientific bent. She did not put complete credence in this scholar.

"I think I will," she announced. "I'll go on before I get any older. Good day."

The scientist hesitated, evidently meditating the advisability of going—young or not—with her. But she settled the matter by continuing up the mountainside at a pace calculated to discourage legs of any degree of scholarship, and he contented himself with a smirk and a wave of the hand.

"I shall see you," he called after her, with a reversion to his polished diction, "anon, at least!"

When she had put a good sized segment of the mountain between herself and this singular savant, Helen paused to take account of the situation. She was tired, hot, and hungry. The sun had passed the zenith and made a visible beginning of the westward journey, for the saga of the blonde had been longer than her hair, and the journey to the caveman's lair no short one.

It had been her intention to find her coveted retreat, and invite her soul, her appetite, and the chipmunks at the same time, but by now the claims of the appetite had set aside all others. She had striven and suffered much, and she felt she could do quite nicely without all the accessories if she could only have food.

So she sat down on the first moss-upholstered log that offered, and ate without ceremony and without sentiment. Something, she thought with depression, had gone wrong with this day.

However, when she had disposed of her refreshments, her spirits arose, and she felt hopeful of saving something from the wreck. It is an odd but indubitable fact that the soul sometimes comes more briskly to the front when there is food within the body. She stretched herself, and looked up to the top of the mountain.

"I'll go excelsioring," she thought, "and away up there under the little clouds I'll certainly find what I'm looking for."

So she set forth again valiantly. The slope was steep, and the trail faint, almost lost in thickets of fern and bramble. There were rocks in the way, and here and there a trickle of water made the footing mossy and treacherous.

The girl soon left her breath behind, and had to manage with gasps. But she pressed steadily on.

The mountain was a little one, which upreared in a steady gradient to a broad, wooded top. She fixed her eye on a certain ledge, and told herself that when she had surmounted that she would rest.

She was weary as well as breathless; and she previsionsed, longingly, the grassy spaces at the top where one might lie at ease, the silence, and the peace.

One more pull—a vigorous one—and she would gain it. Now—a clamber, a scramble, a primitive resorting to hands and knees, and—Eureka! The top!

It was all that she had hoped for, all that the top of a little friendly mountain should be. Broad grassy glades intervened between the clumps of woodland; blueberry bushes, laden with their bell-like flowers, clustered about the well-sunned boulders. The rocky ledge, soft with moss, stretched out like a wide, inviting couch. She gave a great sigh of satisfaction and achievement, and sank down on the mossy ledge.

"What the devil?" demanded a startled voice beside her.

Helen turned with a start, and there, staring at her angrily over a clump of blueberry bushes, was the loathly young writer man.

Apparently he had been lying stretched out on the warm ground, and had had time to get only as far as a sitting posture. She, on her part, was kneeling, on her way to complete contact with Mother Earth; and their indignant eyes met on a level.

"So you're here!" exclaimed the odious person.

"I might say the same to you," Helen pointed out, indignation giving her breath. "It isn't your mountain, is it?"

"No, by George! It seems to be everybody's mountain. I came to this place to be alone—and it's gabble in the dining room, and bleached blondes in the gullies, and strange guys on the ridges, and—"

"And girls on the mountaintop," supplemented Helen with cold fury as he paused significantly. "Well, you needn't

worry about the last item. I assure you I have no desire to stay in any place where you are. I came for peace, myself, and I'm going where I can find it."

She gained her feet with as much dignity as a lady can combine with rather skimpy knickerbockers.

At this the young man also scrambled up.

"Oh, I don't want to shoo you off," he said, with grumpy compunction. "Sit down and take a rest, and I'll do the exiting."

"Thank you," returned Helen. "I prefer to go myself. I'm going at once."

"You are not," contradicted the insufferable young man. "I'm the one that's going. You're the one that's staying. Good-by."

He was off as he spoke, lowering himself over the ledge by his muscular arms, and crossing the steep, bare slope below it with strides of a reckless length. Helen watched him until the trees hid him from sight. He did not look back.

At all events, the mountaintop was hers at last. She sat down in the midst of the peace she had struggled so long to attain, leaned back against a rock, and set about inviting her soul.

But her soul persistently refused to come; this last disappointment had routed it utterly. She knew the last was the one to blame, because she could not get the annoyance of it out of her mind—the young man's churlish words, his horrid manner of speaking them, the odd way, the exasperating, unforgettable way, his dark hair waved in a crisp crest on his forehead.

Boorish, repellent, atrocious person! Soul, where are you? See the cloud shadows floating across the green meadows, far, far down in the valley.

Oh, there he goes, now; crossing that clearing. How fast he travels! Boor!

"Well," Helen mused, rising, "it's no use. Soul, let's call it a day. Wonder what time it is, anyway?"

For the first time since she began climbing she felt for her watch in her breast pocket. It was not there, and she felt in the pockets of her knickers. It was not there, either.

Now she was perturbed. She valued this watch exceedingly, not only because it was beautiful in itself, but, far more, because it was the last thing her beloved father had given her.

"I left it at home, of course," she reassured herself. "I'll hurry back and find it."

She scrambled down the mountain at a pace almost equal to the disagreeable young man's—meeting no loiterers this time—and went straight to her cabin. Everything was exactly as she had left it, the door closed, her possessions, scattered about the little bedroom, undisturbed; but there was no sign of the watch, except the jewel-clasped ribbon by which she usually wore it attached to her wrist.

She remembered, now, taking it off the ribbon, whose catch was not strong, and putting it into her pocket for safer keeping. With a further effort of memory, she recalled setting it by Clericus's battered time-piece, and putting it back again. She could not remember seeing it since.

"I must have dropped it on the mountain!" she thought, in alarm. "Oh, dear, and now it's too late to go up again. What a day—just one old thing after another!"

In deep depression she sat down at her cold hearth and gazed into her black, empty fireplace. Somehow, so far, the simple life was not living up to her expectation of it.

IV

ALL night the thought of her loss haunted her dreams, and the absence of the accustomed watch troubled her wakefulness. She arose betimes, tidied her domain, and set out for breakfast while the birds were still breakfasting. Indeed, she was so early that when she arrived at the main cabin there was no breakfast in sight.

However, the indefatigable Clericus was astir, and when he heard that she arrived so untimely because she had no watch to guide her, he was all sympathy.

"I'll g-get you a b-bite right away," he said, bustling about; "and you can s-start right out to hunt for your watch, b-before any other p-people get around. B-best to be f-first in the f-field. B-best, too, not to t-talk about it to anybody."

This suggestion aroused Helen's apprehension.

"There's no one around here but your tenants, Mr. Agnew, is there?" she said anxiously. "And, of course, any of them would bring it right to you if they found it."

"I h-hope so; I h-hope so, indeed. But where d-diamonds are concerned, you

n-never can tell. P-poor human n-nature! Will you have b-bacon with your egg?"

As he trudged back and forth between kitchen and dining room, he told her, with clerical garrulity, many interesting and valuable facts about lost articles and mountainsides. Climbing, he said, with truth, was an exercise especially adapted to the losing of watches, because of the many violent motions involved.

He himself had lost a watch once in such a manner—not a valuable one like hers, but one endeared by associations; the gift, indeed, of his first parishioners, on which account he prized it above its intrinsic worth.

"That's just the way with mine," put in Helen. "That's why I'm so anxious to get it back. Please, dear Mr. Agnew, I don't want much breakfast; if I could have just a little, and have it soon—"

"One moment, one m-moment!" said the ineffectual, kindly creature, picking up the wrong thing and setting it down again; bustling harder than ever. "The c-claims of the flesh, my dear Miss H-Hope, cannot be s-set aside. You must have n-nourishment. Shortly, sh-shortly."

He moved as diffusely as he talked, with many side issues and irrelevant excursions; the fire was a long time making up its mind to burn, the coffeepot was long a boiling.

Helen grew feverishly impatient, but, fret as she would, it was a full hour after her arrival before she was able to take the road again on her quest.

She followed, as far as possible, exactly in her footsteps of yesterday, scrambling up the steep ridge, visiting the Glen of the Bleached Blonde, clambering laboriously up the steep trail. Everywhere she strained her eyes with searching.

But to find a needle in a haystack is an idle hour's diversion beside finding a watch on a wooded mountainside. There were so many fern thickets she remembered passing over; so many tangles of blackberry vine and laurel she had fought through; so many congeries of stones, left by dried streams, that she had crossed, in any one of which her tiny treasure might lie hidden.

Not only was it impossible to search all the places where she was sure she had been, but there were so many where she was not sure whether she had been or not—this side or that side of the clump of birches; over this fallen log or that?

The result was that she arrived at the

top of the mountain, considerably later than yesterday, tired, discouraged, and empty handed; and she had neglected to bring food. The day was hot, with the oppressive sultriness of spring's first attempt to be summer, and the weight of it exhausted her.

She hauled herself over the lip of the last ledge, gave an unhopeful and unfruitful glance at the place where she had rested yesterday, and sank down, near to the verge of tears.

"Hello!" said a voice beside her. "You here again?"

It was the abhorrent young man, of course. She might have known that he would be on hand, staring at her from among the blueberry bushes, to complete the day's distresses.

But now she was at too low an ebb to be pugnacious; she could not even talk back with a show of decent spirit. She answered with a gulp and in a very small voice:

"Yes, I'm here. I'm sorry."

This unexpectedly mild rejoinder took him completely aback. He took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at her earnestly, with what began as astonishment, continued as scientific scrutiny, and then, suddenly, melted into human sympathy.

"I say," he proffered, with a touch of diffidence surprising in one so uncouth, "I'm afraid you're worried about something."

It was her turn to be taken aback. She had expected him to bark like a dog or roar like a lion, and, instead, he spoke like a human being. His gentleness was almost too much for her; a lump of alarming size jumped up into her throat.

"Yes," she replied. "I've lost my watch. I'll never find it; never. And it was the one my father gave me."

"I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid there isn't much chance of finding it in this wilderness. Perhaps your father would give you another?"

"No," said Helen. "I've lost him, too."

She had no intention of being pathetic; indeed, the words, as she said them, sounded absurd to her ear, as if she had accidentally mislaid her father in some blackberry thicket on the way up.

But the memory of the way he had looked when he gave her the watch, of the desolate all aloneness that had swallowed her up just afterward, smote her as such

memories smite in moments of weariness and defeat, and she had to close her lips quickly on a sob.

The young man arose abruptly, in his big, heavy-shouldered way, and came over to her side.

"I'm awfully sorry," he declared earnestly, sitting down beside her. "I thought, to look at you, you hadn't a care in the world. When did you lose the watch—yesterday?"

She nodded mutely, unable to speak; and, at the motion, a couple of the tears, with which her eyes were brimming, spilled over and ran down her cheeks.

"I say!" he said, looking profoundly disturbed. "Something's got to be done about this. I'll go right down and hunt for it. Where did you miss it first?"

His concern shamed Helen into self-control, and she wiped her eyes and steadied her voice.

"Up here, yesterday afternoon. That's why I came back. I didn't mean to interrupt you again; I didn't do it on purpose."

"Good Lord, you have as much right here as I have. As a matter of fact, you have a lot more. I ought to be down in my shack, working; but my work's all to the bad to-day, somehow, and I came up to see if I could get any light on it."

Helen's mind was a little distracted from its trouble by the contemplation of the way that odd black crest of his moved as he shook his head impatiently. It looked both crisp and soft, virile, and at the same time appealing to the touch.

"Did you?" she asked. "Get any light, I mean?"

"Well—yes, I rather think I did. I'm writing a novel—trying to finish it in time to enter the Barrows competition—and I was awfully stuck for a situation; and suddenly it occurred to me that something might be done with a mountaintop, people happening to meet there, you know, in sun and wind and spaciousness and all that. So I came up again to get the feel of it, and I think I actually was getting at something."

"And then I came and distracted you! I suppose you were furious when you saw me."

"No, I really wasn't," answered the young man, with the air of one stating a fact of doubtful credibility. "That sounds odd; and it is odd, too. But, you see, I

have a girl in this mountaintop scene, and when I saw you come slithering up over the rock again, the way you did yesterday, it occurred to me that that would make a novel entrance. You have a remarkable technique, you know—as if you had no bones at all. I was really interested.”

Helen gazed at him, almost forgetting her depression in perplexity. He was looking at her earnestly, but while young men had looked at her earnestly and thoroughly before, so many times that it was no novelty, there was something in his scrutiny that she had never yet encountered. He looked at her as if he were a bacteriologist, and she were a germ.

His scientific and impersonal viewpoint fascinated her. She began to feel as if she were indeed a germ, or, at most, an exhibit.

“I’m glad if I can be of use to you,” she said rather limply. “You were very kind about my—my watch.”

“Oh, your watch!” he exclaimed, jumping up. “I was forgetting your watch. Describe it to me, and I’ll start right off hunting for it.”

“There’s not much use in your doing that. I came by such a happen to chance trail that I could hardly find it again myself; I’m sure you never could.”

“True for you. All right; I’ll wait until you’re rested, then.”

“Oh, that’s awfully good of you. I’m not very tired; I’ll be ready to start in a jiffy.”

“You’re a good sport. We’ll go whenever you feel like it. You ought not to stay up here very long, anyway; there’s going to be a thunderstorm before sunset.”

Now that he spoke of it, Helen could see well enough that there was a decided storm promise in the air. The sun still shone bright and hot, but the violet shadowed thunderheads were piled thick on the horizon, and the moving shadows on the far-away plain were heavy.

She hated thunderstorms. She jumped up.

“I’m ready now,” she said. “On, Stanley, on!”

He looked at her commendingly.

“You are a good sport,” he reiterated. “No need to call me familiar quotations out of Bartlett, though. My name’s Jim Hollis.”

Helen blinked. “Not James Hetherington Hollis?”

“Yes. Silly moniker, isn’t it? I’d throw the ballast overboard, only there’s another James Hollis in my business, and we get mixed up. Call me Jim; I hate the rest of it.”

She was silent for a moment, too dazzled to speak. Many times had she followed the magic of that name through pages and pages of a popular magazine, past tires and spark-plugs and asbestos roofing, to a triumphant and glamorous ending between the patent gelatin and the canned soup.

She had supposed James Hetherington Hollis to be a superhuman, crowned, perhaps, with laurel, at the very least wearing spats and a monocle. It was incredible that she should be face to face with him here on a mountaintop, casually clad in corduroys and a khaki shirt, and crested with tousled black hair instead of being adorned with bays.

He, however, was unaware of her awe; he seemed too single-minded a person for self-consciousness. He had already scrambled over the ledge, and now looked up, expecting her to follow.

“What’s yours?” he asked, as if with an afterthought.

“My what?”

“Name.”

“Oh! Helen Hope.”

He shook his head. “Don’t like it—too soft. With a sentimental surname like that you ought to have something harsh and vigorous to begin on. I’ll call you Susan. Come on, Susan; give me your fist.”

She put her hand in his, and followed him over the ledge. Short as the rest was, it had done her an amazing amount of good; she felt refreshed and energetic.

He, on his part, seemed as resilient and tireless as rubber; apparently he and weariness were total strangers. They started on their journey down the mountainside, separating to search for the watch, calling now and then, disjointedly, from thicket to thicket.

But the thunder clouds went along with them. First there was only a pillowly threat around the far horizon; then the pillows were shaken up by an unseen hand, and shoved nearer together; and then they began to converge in a mighty celestial pillow fight.

The sunshine left the mountaintop, and down in the copses where the searchers were searching the shadows hung leaden.

They stopped and looked at each other with the nameless uneasiness that sensitive people feel before an outburst of nature's bad temper. Their faces gleamed waxily in the green twilight.

"I say, Susan," remarked James Hetherington Hollis, "it's time you beat it out of here."

"Oh, I don't want to, yet," protested Helen. "We're almost down to the glen where I stopped longest, and I want to hunt there again."

"I'll hunt there. You go along and take to the cyclone cellar; that storm's going to break before you have time to repent of your sins."

"What about you?"

"I'll take a chance on it; I'm tough. I won't stop long. But I'd rather you were under cover. Trot, Susan!"

Helen trotted, obediently. She looked back once, to see if he appreciated her docility, but he was searching diligently, and paying no attention to her at all.

He was ill-mannered, after all; she had been mistaken in changing her opinion of him. She went on with a return of her weariness, as sudden as its departure had been.

When she came out into the clearing that surrounded the main cabin, the storm clouds were so heavy and thick that she shivered. Clericus was bustling about the house, closing windows and carrying chairs inside.

She stopped to ask him for materials for her supper. Even if the weather should permit her to venture out again, she was in no mood for sociability.

He granted her request with his ready amiability.

"Did you f-find your w-watch?" he inquired, as he gathered her supplies.

She shook her head sadly.

"Too b-bad!" he commiserated. "I know j-just how you feel. I n-never got over the loss of the one from my p-parishioners. Well, s-such is l-life."

Helen agreed, took her basket of food, and trudged on wearily toward her cabin. The sky was a mass of lead ingots, and heavy drops were beginning to fall. One hit her on the nose, with the effect of a miniature black-jack.

She quickened her steps, her spirits as heavy as the raindrops. The storm kept pace, and gained on her, and by the time she had scrambled up the steep incline to

her door, she felt as if she had been swimming the Channel for a prize, and had lost.

She shut the door tight against the storm, set down the basket, and, dropping into a chair, gazed dispiritedly at her abode. Rain was dripping down the chimney, plopping into the cold ashes; the beat of it on the low roof seemed to strike her very head. Darkness filled the corners, the thunder began to growl around the eaves, and the lightning to jump just outside the windows.

Her thin silk blouse was wet through, she was cold and tired, and she had not found her watch or any other comfort. A sudden shiver of chill and depression overtook her.

"Well," she thought, rising, "this won't do. Have to get in motion, and brighten up this happy little home."

She knelt by the fireplace and laid paper and kindling on the wet ashes; but, discouraged, perhaps, by the fast falling drops, or, perhaps, suffering from that temperamental disaffection to which it is subject, the fire refused to burn.

She took the elements apart and recomposed them, and stuck lighted matches in among them at artful angles, but still nothing resulted except smoke and smolder.

And now the storm was crashing about the little house as if to demolish it; the rain bombarded the roof and windowpanes, the thunder hurtled around the corners. She was shivering in good earnest, with fright as well as cold; she was in urgent need of the warmth and heartening of fire.

And at this propitious moment she discovered that the match box—the only one with which Clericus has supplied her—had been worsted in the unequal contest, and was empty.

As she made the discovery the last smoky flicker expired. The charred pieces of kindling settled down contentedly beneath the spattering raindrops, like things conscious that they had done their best, and that nothing more could be expected of them.

Helen's morale went up the chimney with the discouraged smoke. No warmth—no dryness—no watch—no hope—no supper but raw bacon. She slumped on her heels before the desolate hearth, and her tears spattered down to join the raindrops in the ashes.

Thump! Suddenly the door quivered under a resounding impact from without.

She jumped to her feet, convinced that the lightning had struck her house, and that all was over with her.

But the thumping came again, accompanied by a rattling at the latch. Some one was trying to knock loud enough to be heard above the clamor of the storm.

A burglar, perhaps? She hurried forward. The whole Rogues' Gallery would be preferable to this depressing and terrifying solitude.

As she lifted the latch, it jumped up at a pressure from the other side, and the door flew open. There sprang into the room, simultaneously, a gust of wind, a spurt of rain, a clap of thunder, and a dark, vigorous, very wet young man.

"You!" exclaimed Helen, on a note of profound thankfulness. "Oh, I am so glad!"

James Hetherington Hollis fastened the door with a quick, efficient motion, shook himself like a dog, and, blinking the water out of his eyes, turned to face her.

"Storm caught me," he said. "Thought I'd take refuge here, if you don't mind. Hello! Raining inside, too? What's the matter?"

Helen winked fast, and managed a small and watery smile.

"Everything's gone wrong," she replied. "I didn't find my watch, and I got sort of—overpowered—by the storm, and the fire wouldn't burn, and there aren't any more matches. I'm adrift in the midst of the stormy deep without any help in sight."

"Good thing I happened along, then. You skip out of here and change that wet shirt, and before you're done I'll fix up a fire that would make Nero jealous."

He was kneeling on the hearth, pulling apart the ruins of her lamentable attempt, as he spoke; and while she dressed she watched him, through the crack of the ill-fitting door, remolding it nearer to the heart's desire.

He worked with the knack of the expert woodsman, making a small, compact structure, feeding it rations of twisted paper, attacking it with dry matches from an inside pocket. When she presently emerged, having changed to a smooth pongee shirt and blue tie, she saw a snapping blaze that leaped gayly up the chimney in defiance of the raindrops.

"Oh, that's gorgeous!" exclaimed Helen. "You're a magician. But how about getting yourself dry?"

"I'll hang my coat on this hickory limb, with your permission, and if you don't mind a little steam, that elegant fire will do the rest. You're looking very fit, now."

"I feel a lot better since you came. I was awfully cold and tired before; and, to tell the honest to goodness truth, I was afraid of the storm. Ooh! *That* was a big one!"

She started again as a mighty clap of thunder crashed above the roof, making the little house quiver. Involuntarily she moved closer to him.

He moved as she did, and laid a protecting arm around her shoulders. They stood still, harking to the violent echoes hurtling down the valley.

Helen observed, to her surprise, that while the storm was momentarily increasing in frenzy, the terror seemed suddenly to have gone out of it. She viewed it now with indulgent dislike, as if it were a wild beast from whom some kindly dentist has extracted all the fangs.

"If you hadn't been here that time," she said, with conviction, "the lightning would have struck the roof and come through into the room and blasted me to a cinder."

He laughed. "Champion shock absorber, that's me. But I'll hand you a medal, Susan, for your splendid nerve. It takes more backbone to be as scared as you are now, and not shout about it, than it does not to be scared at all."

Helen accepted this tribute without demur, for while she believed in honesty, she saw no use in carrying it to the point of fanaticism. The lightning continued to jump, the thunder continued to roar, and the rain to pound on the roof.

James Hetherington Hollis continued to keep a protecting arm around the girl's shoulders; she continued to view the tumult with complete serenity; the fire continued to burn merrily, and all was well.

Presently the thunderstorm ceased, as abruptly as it had begun. There was a last distant flash, a last sullen growl away down the valley; and then, suddenly, silence.

The two moved apart and stood looking at each other. And now, the chaperonage of the storm withdrawn, constraint fell upon them.

"Well," said Hollis, with none of the felicity of the finished writer—with, indeed, a distinct awkwardness of technique—"I expect I'd better be going."

Helen hesitated. It was one of the tentative moments when something which has been begun may go on shyly but steadily, or may stop definitely short; and she suddenly found the stopping short idea uncongenial.

At the same time she had no intention of doing anything as crude as playing the siren to a woman-hater. But while she hesitated, she became aware of a quiet pattering on the roof, which soothed her ears and brightened her eyes.

The rain, providentially, had not moved on with the thunder, but stayed to offer the neatest solution possible.

"Better wait till it stops raining," she suggested. "You're not dry yet."

"By George, I should say not; I'm steaming like a clambake," acquiesced the young man. "But you don't want me messing up your premises any longer. It's almost time for chow; you'll be wanting to get ready."

"Oh, I'm ready now—more than ready, in fact. I didn't have any lunch, and I've got my dinner in that basket. Eggs; bacon. Do you want some?"

"Susan, you're inspired! Something told me you were set apart from ordinary females. Bacon and eggs over a fireplace, on a rainy night! Gimme the frying pan."

Dropping the damp coat he had just picked up, he knelt down before the fireplace, his dark face beaming with enthusiasm, and began to rearrange the embers in a supper welcoming posture. Helen, reflecting his ardor, set about unpacking the basket, handing him the supplies, and filling the coffeepot.

Their momentary constraint was gone, like the thunder. They understood each other with the instinctive understanding of a hungry man and a hungry woman intent on satisfying the primal need.

"Set the coffeepot in this nice red hole, Susan," directed Hollis, taking command, as the male is prone to do in situations affecting the appetite. "Now give me a plate to slide the bacon onto while I fry the eggs. And pass me that tin, will you, for the extra juice? Now the eggs; good job he gave you four."

"Two were my breakfast," Helen explained.

"Never mind, I'll bring you larks' tongues and linnets' eggs for breakfast. Here, put a couple of these shells into the coffee. Stir 'em in well. And set this

bacon on the mantel, please, so the ashes won't get in it."

Helen decided to do a little bossing on her own account, for his good as well as for self-protection.

"Just move over a little way," she suggested. "I want to make toast, and you take up the whole fireplace."

"What toast? You're a blooming sybarite. I could eat the frying pan if it was buttered on one side."

"So could I. If I don't have a job to take up my mind, I'm likely to absorb that whole plate of bacon while I wait. Move over, please."

The head cook moved hastily.

"For Heaven's sake, make toast," he urged. "Come a little more this way, Susan; yon's the spot for bread."

Shoulder to shoulder they cooked their food, and themselves in companionable intimacy until the coffee boiled over; and then ensued the agreeable bustle of rescuing and serving a meal, all of whose elements are ready simultaneously, and all in danger of cremation.

A splutter of spilled bacon fat, a smoke of scorched toast, a human burn or two, a breathless moment of suspense, and the steaming coffee, the sizzling bacon and eggs, the buttered toast, were all safely transferred to the little table. The two were seated opposite each other, as triumphant as Lucullus and a lady friend at the most sumptuous of banquets.

"This is a marvelous situation, Susan," observed James Hetherington Hollis, with his mouth regrettably full of bacon. "I wonder why it's never been done in a novel?"

"Oh, I'm sure anything that's happened as often as good bacon and eggs couldn't help being written up," said Helen sagely around a bite of toast. "Isn't the coffee delicious?"

"Ineffable. It's never been done in literature as it should have been done; never with justice. I'm going to have a go at it. I'm going to put in this fire, and this rain on the roof, and this absolutely inexpressible toast. I think I'll put you in, too."

"I thought you hated me," said Helen demurely. "I thought having women around cramped your style."

"You can't write a novel without women; worse luck. And I'm getting sort of resigned to you, Susan. No lady that can

make coffee like this can be regarded as a complete blot on the cosmic scheme. Having a good time, Susan?"

"You bet I am."

"The indicated response is, 'You bet I am, Jim.' Say it, Susan. You haven't said my name once."

"You bet I am, Jim."

"Now, that's the way a lady ought to talk, in a novel or out of one; simple, clear, and right to the point. I'm fed up on subtlety, such as:

"Is it necessary?" her ladyship indicated, dimly acknowledging the inhibitions that warred against the deep subliminal impulse she would not, even to herself, admit.

"Blah!"

"You do seem nonsubtle," Helen agreed.

"That makes you a comfortable sort of person to have around."

"Think so, Susan? I'm glad," said Jim shyly.

There was a little pause. How warm and comforting is the purr of a half burned out wood fire! How companionable and sheltering the pitapat of raindrops on a low roof!

But they were not old enough friends for silence. Helen broke it a little uneasily before it should acquire significance; although what sort of significance might lurk in it she could not have said.

"Are you a comfort when it comes to washing dishes, too?"

"Try me, Susan. I'm mother's little helper."

To prove his worth he immediately, with ingenious pride in his foresight, set the dishwasher to heat. When the meal was finished, and the cigarette stubs had been tossed into the fire, they washed up companionably, with much merriment.

And now the rain had stopped, and there was no valid reason for longer lingering. The distinguished writer cast a wistful look around him, picked up his well-dried coat, and turned reluctantly to the door.

"Good night, Susan," he said. "Thanks, a lot, for taking me in out of the storm. I'd have perished otherwise."

"Don't mention it," returned Helen; "any time you're in danger of drowning, I'll be glad to play the part of the straw for you."

"I'll remember that," said Jim Hollis, clasping her hand in a grip that hurt her fingers.

When he had gone, Helen looked about the little empty cabin. It seemed, somehow, to offer much less in the way of entertainment and resources than it had a little while ago. There was nothing left, indeed, but to go to bed.

But on her way she stopped at the little window, peered into the dark night, and laughed under her breath. She had just remembered that the cabin of the author was a long step nearer the place where the storm had overtaken them than her own.

"Completely simple and straightforward, are you, James Hetherington Hollis?" she chuckled. "So's your Aunt Minnie's wall-eyed Persian cat!"

V

WHEN morning came, no reinforcements of larks' tongues or linnets' eggs were waiting on the doorstep, and Helen—having attired herself with a trifle more attention to detail than on the preceding day—set out bright and early to get her breakfast.

The morning was exquisitely fresh, the leaves glistening after the rain, the air clearer than a new washed window. The early birds welcomed her as a kindred spirit, and she tossed a song back to them as she passed along the woodland way.

She was not the only early one astir, as she soon discovered. Passing near a cabin which she had thought untenanted, she saw, to her surprise, what architects call the rear elevation of a masculine person before the door, bending over a large packing case.

The person was so absorbed in the contemplation of the object, which he seemed about to crack with a chisel and hammer, that he failed to hear her approach. Remembering the blond woman's admonition, she threw out another little fanfare of song as a herald.

The man jumped visibly, turned, and presented to her view the scholarly mien and solemn raiment of the geologist she had met on the mountainside. Evidently he had the nervous temperament that often accompanies addiction to intellectual pursuits, for he was so startled that as he whirled about he dropped his hammer.

"G-good morning, madam!" he said breathlessly. "You move so silently, I—I was unaware of your advent."

"Why, I thought I was making a lot of noise," answered Helen. "I'm sorry I frightened you."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," disclaimed the scholar hastily. "I was not frightened—merely surprised."

"I had thought myself alone with my books," he added, indicating the box with a dignified gesture of the chisel.

"Oh! Do you always take such a lot of books as that into the wilderness?" asked Helen, surprised.

"Invariably," said the scientist, recovering his poise to some extent. "I cannot live without my books. As soon as I found that this place afforded the needed facilities for study, I sent for them. They just arrived—at a rather unreasonable hour, you may think; but I assure you there are practical difficulties about transporting a case of that size into the mountain wilds. Especially when it contains, exclusively, articles as weighty as books." He looked at her with an odd effect of defiance.

"I'm sure of it," said Helen politely. "You must be a born executive."

"No, no," returned the scholar modestly; "only a born bibliophobe."

Helen looked puzzled.

"Well," she said, after a brief pause, wherein she decided that word should have been "bibliophile," "I'm going on to breakfast. Are you?"

"I can't instantaneously," said the scientific man, relaxing into gallantry, "but I promise not to keep you waiting long. If winter comes, spring won't be far behind, as the writer fellow said."

He smirked at her, with an expression that seemed to be the learned equivalent of "Ah, there, kiddo!"

Helen went on at a slightly accelerated pace, pondering this conversation. Something about it struck strangely on her ear. It would never have occurred to her that there could be any more natural equipment for a man of learning than books, yet he had apparently expected her to doubt his statement.

And that smirk that played so inaptly about the scholarly spectacles! This scientist puzzled her a good deal, and intrigued her not at all.

At the clubhouse she found herself the earliest arrival; having no timepiece, she had again anticipated the hour. But the tireless Clericus was already about, trotting between kitchen and dining room in his industrious, ineffectual way, something like a well-intentioned elderly rabbit; and he made her welcome, as always.

"D-don't apologize!" he said kindly. "Any time you c-come, you are like the flowers of spring, Miss H-Hope. But it certainly is too b-bad about your w-watch. I'll tell you what I'll d-do; we've got an alarm clock here in the k-kitchen—a t-trifle old, but not much b-broken—and I'll g-give you that to c-come to meals by."

Helen thanked him warmly; he was certainly the most thoughtful of hosts. She offered to go away and wait until the clock showed her the appointed minute, but this he would not permit.

"You're only a l-little early," he assured her, "and your p-presence is a great p-pleasure. The others will be c-coming soon. There's a new l-lady—c-came yesterday, in the st-storm—and I can t-tell to look at her that she'll be p-prompt. She's a widow, c-come into retirement to mourn the loss of her dear sp-spouse. Poor s-soul. I hope our little group can ch-cheer her up."

"Mr. Agnew," said Helen, "has it ever struck you that there was anything queer about this geologist?"

Clericus stood still by the table, a sugar bowl in his hand, and gazed at her earnestly through his dark glasses.

"Qu-queer?" he faltered. "How do you mean—qu-queer?"

"Well, not exactly like a real scientist. He uses such strange words, and he looks so strange, but his manner's strange, too. I can't help thinking he's not what he claims to be."

Clericus looked profoundly troubled. "You distress me, Miss H-Hope; you do, indeed. I know n-nothing about him but what he himself t-told me; but I took him for a t-trustworthy person. I like to t-trust my fellow men. We are all G-God's c-creatures."

He seemed so perturbed that Helen was half sorry she had voiced her incipient doubt. She felt much older and more experienced than this gentle, unworldly man, and would have been glad to protect his trustfulness.

At the same time it was certainly well that one so guileless should be put on his guard if he meant to attempt business relations with a wicked world. She did not know whether to soothe his distress or encourage it.

Before she had time to decide, there was a rustle at the door, and a lady of uncertain age and sable raiment entered. Cleri-

cus had no need to herald her status; she bore refined widowhood upon her like a sandwich board. He brightened at her advent, and trotted happily forward to admit the claims of hospitality.

"G-good morning!" he cried eagerly. "L-ladies, you must kn-know each other. Miss H-Hope, Mrs. T-Tipton. Little Miss H-Hope is our ray of sunshine, Mrs. T-Tipton is—is—our new arrival. How did you r-rest, Mrs. T-Tipton? I hope the r-roof didn't spring another l-leak. I worried about that r-roof nearly all night."

Mrs. Tipton gave a refined and slightly pained smile, as of one who deemed it not quite proper that gentlemen should worry about her roof after 9 P.M.

"I thank you," she said, in a very ladylike manner. "I passed the night quite dryly."

"It was a t-terrible storm," remarked Clericus, bringing the cereal. "I never s-saw a worse, except at my s-second parish, at S-San Antonio, Texas. There they have what they call n-northerners—simply ap-palling. How did you f-fare, Miss Hope? Were you f-frightened?"

"No, not after the beginning," answered Helen, truthfully; "but I did think I was struck by lightning a couple of times."

"I think you're a very r-remarkable young lady," said Clericus, with enthusiasm, "to stay all alone through a s-storm like that and not be f-frightened. Don't you, Mrs. T-Tipton?"

Mrs. Tipton gave a pinched, disapproving smile of great refinement, and wobbled her head noncommittally, as if to indicate that she was too ladylike to say what she thought of such conduct.

Helen, hearing a heavy step on the porch, looked around in trepidation lest Jim Hollis should appear and betray the source of her courage to so censorious an observer. But it was only the lady of the semiblonde locks; and she turned back to her breakfast, with a curiously flat sense of relief.

Mrs. Rosalie Erroll and Mrs. Tipton, who had met the night before, exchanged an elaborate greeting of mutual suspicion, and Mrs. Erroll enthusiastically plumped down beside Helen.

"My Gawd, deary," she began, "I thought you was lost in the wash! I was hopin' all day yest'd'y you'd come an' see me. Gosh, I was so lonesome I'd 'a' been glad to see a cockroach."

"I'm sorry. I didn't have much time for visiting. I climbed the mountain, and I'd no sooner got down than the storm came."

"Oh, that's all right, deary. A little bird told me they seen you walkin' with a young man, an' o' course that means all bets are off with the girls. Pretty cute, you are—knockin' down and draggin' in a boy friend before you been here two days! Whadja use, chloroform or a lasso? Don't mind me, deary; I'm a great little joker."

The widow's ladylike expression was so strongly indicative of a reaction to an unwelcome odor that Helen couldn't control a giggle.

"Joke all you want to; I don't mind," she said. "My methods are peaceful, thank you; the brass knuckles in the velvet glove. No need to use violence here, anyway, with so many men. There's a scientist in the cabin with the white doorstep."

Mrs. Erroll leaned toward her to administer a jocose dig in the ribs. "You go teach your grandmother to milk ducks! Whadja think I'm up so early for? I got next to that guy the day he come. I think he's elegant; I never seen such a refined gentleman. I can't seem to make no headway with your boy friend; he's dame shy; but this one's my meat."

The eyes of the widow, across the table, brightened combatively. Evidently she was not too much a weeping willow to be incapable of an interest in refined gentlemen. We would see, said her sharp black eyes, whose meat this was.

There was another footstep on the threshold, and Helen turned again with a sudden inner tension. She was afraid it was Jim Hollis, and she did not want to meet him before the gimlet eyes of the widow and the candid tongue of the divorcee.

Since the storm, something had been begun between them which she could not herself analyze, which needed privacy and peace for its right unfolding. But her uneasiness was groundless; the newcomer was only the scientist, and once again she turned back with a relief that was somehow depressing.

Clericus fussed forward like a kindly little majordomo, inducted the scholar into the group, introduced him to the widow as Professor Babcock, and went to purvey prunes to him. At once Mrs. Rosalie Erroll, relinquishing Helen, took charge of

the professor in a manner befitting a lady of experience.

"Well, professor, how's business to-day?" she inquired, with brisk archness.

"Can't complain, madam!" he returned, amiably responsive. "I got my books—my best friends, I always call them—bright and early to-day, and I had a visit from a bright and early little bird, too. I mean the little lady here." He nodded with gallant patronage toward Helen.

"Did, huh?" said Mrs. Erroll, chuckling at Helen. "I'll say you gotta get up last night to get ahead o' her! Whadja do for him this time o' day, deary, shave him?"

The widow sniffed audibly.

"When I was young," she remarked, in a pinched tone of great ladylikeness, "young ladies—well-brought-up young ladies—didn't call on gentlemen before breakfast."

"Back to the mothballs, Lena!" the blonde returned, truculently. "Them ideas went overboard when Noah dumped the garbage out o' the Ark. Modern girls call when they please. Don't we, deary?"

"I don't care when other people make their calls," said Helen, looking coldly at the man of science, "but I didn't call on Professor Babcock. I passed his cabin when he was getting ready to open his box of books, but my presence seemed to disturb him, so I came right on."

The professor looked disconcerted, his smirk wavered and faded out abruptly, and she observed with satisfaction that Clericus, instead of rushing to his rescue like a kindly Christian host, was studying him with a questioning and doubtful look.

But not so the two ladies. The girl's coldness had enlisted their warm sympathy, and they began to vie with each other in extending solace.

"Have some cream, professor," urged Mrs. Tipton. "Have plenty. Put a little butter on your cereal, too. There's nothing so good for a gentleman as a good, nourishing breakfast. My husband always used to say how remarkably I fed him—my late husband."

She bridled a little, youthfully, to show that she was now without impediments.

"Gee, I'll bet he's glad he's late," muttered Mrs. Erroll, in an audible aside. "Watch out for the cream, professor, if you want to keep the little old girlish figure. Watch out for the cereal, too. Best

breakfast for you is a soft-boiled egg an' a cup o' black coffee; you're a little inclined to go to waist, as they say."

Mrs. Tipton opened her lips for a smart defense of the professor's dimensions, but Helen excused herself and slipped away before it broke. She foresaw lively skirmishing between these two worthy foemen, for this so desirable prize, and she was not in a mood to witness conflict; moreover, she wanted to be alone when she met Jim.

But when she reached the glade before his cabin she heard his typewriter clicking away as steadily as if it never intended to stop. Apparently he had either got his breakfast or meant not to have any; at all events, he was completely oblivious of everything outside his own four walls.

She walked on slowly and listlessly. There was nothing to hurry her; the day stretched ahead as flat and uneventful as Kansas.

When she had tidied her cabin and could think of nothing else to do, she wandered out to hunt again for her watch in the glen where the search had been curtailed yesterday by the storm. No one was visible near the cabins or in the pathways, but as she approached the clubhouse Clericus emerged, hurriedly, and with a suggestion of stealth, and waylaid her. The breakfasters had dispersed, and Mrs. Clericus could be heard viciously washing up the dishes in the kitchen.

"Miss H-Hope," said Clericus in a low voice, drawing her into the shelter of the trees, "I've been th-thinking about your w-watch. I've been w-worrying about it. And I've decided to d-do something—my f-feeble best—to m-make up to you for the l-loss. L-look here."

He delved into his waistcoat pocket and brought out—instead of Old Faithful, as she expected—an object that made her catch a quick breath.

Amazingly—in that sylvan glade and from that worn clerical pocket—there flashed before her eyes a diamond pendant of startling beauty and brilliance; great, lustrous stones set in an intricate design, hanging from a chain whose meshes were bright with diamond dewdrops.

Clericus stood with his back to the house, and the pendant cautiously cupped between his hands. But even thus shielded, it drew the sunlight like a magnet and flung it back in a shower of dazzling sparkles.

"Oo-oo!" exclaimed Helen, astounded. "Where did you get such a gorgeous thing?"

"Sh! S-speak lower!" urged Clericus, glancing about seriously. "I—this is rather c-confidential, Miss H-Hope; I have to be a little—er—reserved about it. This p-pendant is an heirloom in my f-family, and, as you see, it's very h-handsome. I've known for some time that it was too h-handsome for us to afford to keep; and s-since your loss, I've decided to offer it to you at a s-sacrifice. But Mrs. Agnew will disapprove s-strongly of the idea, and I'd rather she didn't kn-know of it—n-not yet, anyway."

"Then—do you think you ought to do it?" hesitated Helen.

"Oh, it's for her own g-good!" answered Clericus earnestly. "She'll be g-glad enough to g-get the money; we n-need it. But I think I'll ask you, Miss H-Hope, to say nothing of the t-transaction to her. Mrs. Agnew and I—I'm s-sorry to say—don't always see eye to eye in m-money m-matters."

Helen's suspicion of domestic complications in the lives of the Clerici increased, and she felt profoundly sorry for this troubled, reverend man. She took the jewel out of his fingers—he glancing uneasily at the house as she did so—and sheltered it in her own. Its brilliance, enhanced by the primitive simplicity of its surroundings, dazzled her.

"It's simply sumptuous!" she said. "Did you say it was an heirloom?"

"Yes; my g-great-g-great-g-grandmother had it for her w-wedding. We were w-wealthy in those days," answered Clericus sadly.

"But surely this platinum setting is modern?"

"Oh, yes; y-yes. My father had that done with the l-last of the family m-money; he was a p-plunger, my p-poor father. I offer it to you, Miss H-Hope, for t-two hundred d-dollars."

Helen stared at him. "Two hundred dollars! But it must be worth at least a thousand!"

"I suppose so; I s-suppose it is. But, for reasons of s-sentiment, as well as for—f-family considerations, I can't offer it for s-sale p-publicly; and I need m-money; there's another p-payment due on this p-property. And then, Miss H-Hope, there's your w-watch. I feel much trou-

bled at your having lost it on our p-premises; I w-want to make amends. So altogether I beg you—as a f-favor, Miss H-Hope—to take it for t-two hundred."

He looked so anxious, in his gentle, not wholly present way, that Helen was deeply touched. She knew she didn't need the pendant, and her father had often told her not to be extravagant; but this did seem a special occasion. She waited a half minute—for her father had told her never to come to an important decision in a hurry—and then smiled at the unpractical merchant.

"All right, Mr. Agnew, I'll take it," she said, "on condition that you let me give you five hundred for it."

The eyes of Clericus shone even through the dark glasses.

"Miss H-Hope! You're too g-good!" he cried joyfully. "Are you—are you sure I ought to l-let you give me such a p-princely sum?"

"If you don't," said Helen firmly, "I won't have it."

"Then," exclaimed Clericus, with a gesture of lavish generosity, "t-take it!"

Helen took it, academically speaking, for the beautiful thing was already in her hand. She looked at it exultantly, but, as it sparkled back at her with its myriad faceted diamonds she had a moment of misgiving.

"I haven't any use for it here," she said, "and I might lose it, as I did my watch. I wish you'd keep it for me until I go."

Clericus looked alarmed.

"Oh, no, Miss H-Hope! Oh, n-no!" he protested. "Please t-take it at once. It will be p-perfectly safe in your cabin—and—and—under my f-family c-circumstances I'd rather not have it in m-mine."

Poor martyr. Helen looked at him in tactfully silent sympathy; how often it happens that these gentle, defenseless men are victimized by shrews! Probably Mrs. Clericus was determined to wear the heirloom herself; no doubt she had nagged her poor patient husband until he could have no peace without putting it beyond her clutches.

"Very well," she said gently, "I'll do as you wish. Thank you, Mr. Agnew."

Clericus's mild face beamed upon her.

"Thank you!" he answered happily. "No h-hurry about the check; any time to-day. You are my—our—b-benefactress. I t-told you that you came among us like a b-breath of your n-name."

As she turned away, he raised his hand in a gesture of approval and benediction which gave him an odd resemblance to that learned doctor who used to speak so beautifully, in the advertising pages, of hope in connection with bunions.

Going back to her cabin, Helen wrapped her new acquisition carefully in tissue paper, deposited it in the deepest pocket of her suit case, underneath her discarded city raiment, and pushed the case under the bed. But she smiled at herself as she took these precautions, for she knew there was, as Clericus said, no danger of any one disturbing her dwelling. Such bits of jewelry as she had brought had lain unmolested on the primitive dressing table ever since she arrived.

And now she set out again on her postponed quest. But although she hunted all day, she found nothing but the bleached blonde, whom she avoided, and the scientist, who avoided her.

No watch. No diversion. No author. In spite of her having acquired an anticipated treasure in jewelry, there seemed to be something lacking about this day. She wondered what.

VI

THE forest glades resounded with alien echoes, which roamed afar through the open spaces and caromed wildly from tree to unaccustomed tree.

"Now, then—one two three; *one two three, one two three, twirl; one two three, one two three, one two three, split!* That's no good; try it again, sweetie."

"All right, only catch me when I turn, you lazy goofer. Anybody 'd think you were paid by the hour to keep that tree from fallin' over."

Helen stood still in the path and gazed, fascinated. Another of the little silent cabins had burst into occupation overnight, and now the level space in front of it was the scene of the most startling activity.

A muscular young man and a buxom young woman, both clad in the briefest of bathing suits and showing a vast extent of handsome naked limbs, were twisting, clutching, and avoiding, with a frenzied concentration that took no account of nature or of man.

They looked like the Laocoön group come to life. What they lacked in snakes they made up in animation.

"Now, hold on tight, baby—one two

three—put your left hand on my shoulder blade—"

"Grab me, I tell you; *grab me!* Whatcha think you are, a stuffed butler? Standin' there like a side order o' cauliflower—"

They gyrated violently, their vigorous and decorative legs striking out in all directions like the sails of a windmill. Helen, feeling as superfluous as one who has involuntarily come in upon a family quarrel, hastened on her way to breakfast. Although she was stiff with self-consciousness as she passed them, neither of the pair paid the slightest attention to her.

When she reached the main cabin she found that she was not the only person impressed by the new arrivals. The widow and the semiblonde were already discussing them animatedly with Clericus.

"All I know is," he was saying, with an effect of patient reiteration, "they are d-dancing partners, called T-Tessie and T-Terry, billed as the T-Triumphant T-Toe T-Twirlers. They are seeking retirement to p-perfect themselves in a new phase of their int-tricate art."

"But are they respectable?" demanded the widow severely.

"They p-paid the entire s-summer's rent in advance!" answered Clericus, with triumph.

"That may be," argued Mrs. Tipton, "and they still not be respectable. I had some tenants who paid in advance by the half year, and what do you think I found out about them? They were in the habit of going, night after night, to those low places called cabarets!"

"Cabarets ain't low," refuted Mrs. Erroll indignantly; "lots of 'em 's on roofs."

"I mean in the moral sense," retorted the widow. "Cabarets, speak-easies, and all other dives are sinks of iniquity."

"You don't know what you're talkin' about," affirmed Mrs. Erroll, with heat. "Cabarets ain't speak-easies; you can get all you want in 'em, speakin' right out loud. The most refined ladies an' gentlemen go to 'em. Why, I know a gentleman that's a professor—professor o' palmistry—an' he goes to the Blue Dog reg'lar; an' even when he's so tight he can't hardly navigate, he's just as refined as I am this minute. He talks poetry, an' hymns, an' sacred selections out o' the Bible an' the almanac that he learned when he was young, the Song o' Moses, an' elegant

things like that. Cabarets ain't refined? You go fish in the lake!"

"Perhaps," observed Mrs. Tipton icily, "some people aren't refined enough themselves to know what refinement is."

"Is that so!" riposted Mrs. Erroll, breathing fast. "I ain't refined, huh? If I wasn't refined, d'ja know where I'd tell you to go to, this minute?"

"Ladies, l-ladies!" intervened Clericus, pacifically. "Let's not allow ourselves to get d-disputatious! The w-world is w-wide enough for more than one opinion."

Helen offered a diversion in the bright, Pollyannish manner of a mother turning the thoughts of quarrelsome children into pleasant channels.

"Here comes the geologist!" she said, and, as the learned man's shadow darkened the door, she set aside her prejudice for the sake of the general welfare, and added cheerfully: "Good morning, Professor Babcock! Have you made any discoveries to-day?"

The professor entered briskly, and bowed an affable greeting. "Good morning, good morning!" he said, seating himself at the table. "Good morning, ladies! Good morning, reverend! A most propitious day!"

His arrival produced a marked effect on the embattled dames. They looked at each other more sourly than ever, but as they looked at him the acidity was overlaid with sweetness, like lemon meringue pie.

"Will you have cream and sugar on your cereal, professor?" asked Mrs. Tipton, with tender womanly solicitude.

"Didja sleep good, prof? You look as fresh as next week's eggs," said Mrs. Erroll, with experienced blandishment.

Professor Babcock unfolded genially in this welcoming atmosphere.

"Thank you, cream and sugar; thank you, I slept excellently," he returned. "The little lady asked if I've made any discoveries. I just made a most important one. Who do you think has come to join our little colony? A beautiful young lady dancer!" He rubbed his hands pleasurably.

Helen could hear both her colleagues draw in their breath rapidly.

"If you allude to the young person prancing around out there in the woods," said Mrs. Tipton coldly, "I can't say I see any beauty in any one with such—er—exposed limbs."

"Oh, her legs are all right enough,"

granted Mrs. Erroll, "but her map! It looks like she used it to crack ice with."

"And her actions!" pursued Mrs. Tipton. "Do you think, professor, that any one that calls herself a lady would stand outdoors in broad daylight and elevate her—er—ankle—high enough to pass over the nose of a male companion?"

"I wouldn't mind her kickin'," contributed the blonde, "if she was any good at it. But, my Gawd, you'd think her leg was a steam derrick liftin' a ton o' rock. An' her doin' the split— Well, I've seen a clam that could do it better; honest I have—a dead clam at that."

"I haven't observed her closely enough to be able to pronounce on these fine points," remarked the scientist. "I see I'll have to devote a little specialized study to the subject." He winked at Clericus, and behind the dark glasses the far-away eyes of Clericus seemed to emit an answering twinkle.

Mrs. Tipton got to her feet majestically.

"I will be excused," she said. "I have had enough. I bid you good morning."

Mrs. Erroll also arose.

"I'll roll my hoop, too," she said, with equal coldness. "I got somethin' to do besides feedin' the old fly-trap all day."

"C'mon over to my shack, deary," she added to the widow. "I feel like we'd oughta get better acquainted. Girls of a feather gotta hang together, is my motto."

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Tipton, with alacrity. "It's true, real ladies need each other's companionship in a place like this."

The two went out together in a coalition that would have been incredible a few minutes before. A broad grin spread over, and subtly altered, the scholarly countenance of the geologist.

"Axes sharpenin' for the little toe twirler, eh?" he commented, with a surprising lapse into colloquialism. "Well, she's a nifty piece o' goods. Can't blame the dames for gettin' sore at her, can you?"

"M-matters of that kind," returned Clericus, with gentle rebuke, "are n-not within my p-province."

"Nor mine," said Professor Babcock, returning suddenly to his scholastic manner. "I have more important concerns than frivolity on my hands. Beautiful young dancers—however entrancing—never paid any grocery bills for me."

"Quite the c-contrary, perhaps," mur-

mured the Rev. Mr. Agnew, permitting himself a clerically naughty twinkle.

"Did scientific study?" asked Helen searchingly.

"It helps; it helps," answered Professor Babcock. "Even a scholarly pursuit, Miss Hope, has its practical aspects."

"Everything," said Clericus, in a dreamy theological voice, "has its own appointed p-place. Even t-toe d-dancers. Even—even widows."

Helen finished her repast, and started back toward her lodge. The dancing pair had now disappeared inside their cabin; perhaps dressing, if such debonair children of nature think the process necessary for breakfast.

The writer's typewriter was clicking busily as usual, and the woods seemed very deserted. But just as Helen reached the spot where the trail to her aerie branched off the main path, she was surprised to see a strange man loitering in a purposeless manner, carving his initials or some other work of art on the trunk of a moose maple tree, and casting sharp glances about him.

He turned at her approach, and, touching his cap with a rudiment of manners, accosted her.

"Beg pardon, miss," he said in a husky voice. "Do you hang out here?"

Helen looked at him with some surprise, and more disfavor. He was not an endearing nor even an intriguing figure; his face was round and pudgy, his nose retroussé without sprightliness, his raiment baggy and shapeless around a paunchy form. He looked to her very irrelevant in that sylvan scene, and his interest in her presence seemed to her even more so.

"I'm renting a cabin here for a few weeks," she answered coldly. "Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, just askin'. Like it here? Nice quiet place?"

"Very. That's why I came," she replied pointedly; "to be alone."

"I guess there's other folks here for the same reason. See much of 'em?"

"Very little. You're quite right; everybody here came for peace and quiet. So, if you'll excuse me—"

She turned away as she spoke and entered her little path with an excellent cool dignity; but she was aware of an uneasiness that made her heart beat faster. What purpose had this rather grubby stranger in invading their sylvan solitudes? Any one

who looked less like a faun it would be difficult to imagine.

"Oh, that's all right, miss," the man called after her affably. "Just askin' a few questions. Thinkin' o' stayin' here a while myself; like the looks o' things."

She felt his sharp eyes on her as she went up the path, and it was all she could do not to glance uneasily over her shoulder. When she had entered her cabin and closed the door, she peered out cautiously through the creeper shielded window and saw him still looking after her.

Presently, as she did not reappear, he went away, but as far as she could follow him she could see him casting sharp, inquisitive glances from side to side, more in the manner of a city sparrow than a hermit thrush.

Her uneasiness persisted while she did her morning tasks; indeed, it increased, for the more she thought about him the less she liked his looks or understood his presence. It was true that a rather odd assortment of people had been drawn by Clericus's proffer of privacy, but each was there for a definite and understandable reason:

Herself, for peace; the author, for leisure to write his book; the geologist, for study; the blonde, for new hair and final papers; the widow, for solace; the dancing partners, for secret practice.

For what purpose could this pudgy, imperfectly shaven individual with the ferret eyes be seeking solitude? For no good one, the girl felt sure.

By the time she had put her house in order she had developed such a well-grown set of misgivings that she hesitated about setting forth again. She pictured the pudgy man lurking behind a tree, ready to greet her with a revolver against the ribs or a sand bag on the brow, or possibly a black, ill-smelling cloak over the head.

The prospect appealed to her so little that she even considered the alternative of staying in and writing letters, which is the vacationist's last desperate stand. But before she had done more than find her pen and paper and concentrate on them a look of intense distaste, she was distracted by a hail from a masculine voice outside.

"Ahoy, up there! Anybody at home in the crow's-nest?"

Helen ran to open the door. She knew that voice; there was nothing paunchy or unshaven about its habitat.

"Only the crow!" she answered gayly, waving her hand to Jim Hollis in the pathway below.

"Looks more like a bird of paradise from here. Come on out, Susan! I can't work to-day; I'm stuck. Would you go for a tramp with me?"

"Would I!" said Helen.

She set about locking up her cabin, for the paunchy man's uncongenial presence had made her resolve to take all possible precautions. But it turned out that the windows had no locks, the back door key was lost, and the only bolt that functioned was the one on the front door, which fastened on the inside.

She abandoned one defense after another, without anxiety. Jim Hollis's arrival had had the same denaturing effect on the pudgy man as on the thunderstorm, and it seemed foolish to worry.

Suddenly perceiving—that she had not realized before—that the morning was a masterpiece of a morning, she hurried out of the door, and launched herself down the path with such gay abandon that she slipped on the pine needles and went skidding and sliding down. Jim stood in her way, as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar, and caught her.

"What do you think you are, Susan, an avalanche?" he remonstrated mildly, as he set her on her feet in the path beside him. "I see that you never come downstairs except by way of the banisters; but that's a technique that can't be encouraged in the mountains. You might crash right through the bottom of the valley, and then where'd you be?"

"In the center of the world; but I don't care for that, it's what I came here to avoid. Now I'm on top of it. What shall we do, Jim, shinny up the mountain?"

"No, I want to show you a gorgeous gorge over there to the east of where the storm caught us. But it's a longish tramp; shall we ask the parson for some grub, and make a day of it?"

Helen gave a little skip of delight as she walked along the path beside him. "Oh, that's a thought and a half! I'd like to make a year of such rapturous weather. Wish we had a coffeepot."

Jim turned around with a metallic clank, and exhibited, between his shoulders, a small khaki knapsack, lumpy with promise. "The wish goes farther than the thought, as the poet never said. There's a complete

cookery kit in that hump; all we lack is the cookables, and we won't lack those long. I've got half a dollar in my pocket that says 'sausages' right under the 'In God We Trust.'"

"Oh, Jim, you're inspired! If you have as good ideas for stories as you have for menus, you're a genius."

He frowned at that. "I'm pretty much unmade, right now. I came here with what I thought was a good hunch, but somehow, lately, it's got off the track. I worked like a dog all day yesterday, and began to-day at the crack of dawn, and I haven't a thing to show for it but a couple of new swear words. If I can't take a brace, I may as well kiss that competition goodbye."

"What seems to be the matter?"

"It's that confounded girl. She's gone clever on me. I started her somber and brooding, and now she's turned bright and buoyant. When I want her to introspect, she epigrams. She used to be silent and scornful, but somehow I got a notion that a chatty girl was lots nicer, and now, before I know it, I've got her prattling. And the worst thing is her eyes; every time I go to mention the dark Spanish lamps I started her with, I find myself saying they're blue."

Helen flashed him a startled blue glance, but he was staring moodily at the ground, and before she had thought of an appropriate reply they were at the main cabin.

Here Clericus acceded willingly to all their requests, pocketed the half dollar in his ready Christian way, and trotted inside to collect the provender. While she stood waiting, with Jim, on the porch, Helen glanced in through the window, and was surprised and disturbed to see the pudgy man, whose unpleasant existence she had temporarily forgotten, sitting in one of the rustic chairs and glancing at one of the pink papers like a person thoroughly at home.

"Look at that!" she said, in a tense undertone to Jim.

"At what?"

"At that man."

"Looks healthy. What about him?"

"I think he looks atrocious. I met him sniffing and snooping around my premises this morning in a very suspicious way. I believe he's here for no good purpose."

"Tush, Susan, you talk like a movie. I've been to the pictures myself, and I

know all villains are concave. They don't come with that style of tummy."

Helen shook her head, and when Clericus emerged she attacked him on the subject.

"Mr. Agnew," she demanded, "what's that man doing here?"

"He's living here, Miss H-Hope; or at least he's about to d-do so. He wishes to r-rent the southeast c-cabin, and become a m-member of our little f-family."

"Oh, don't let him! I don't like him at all. I think he's a terrible person."

"My dear Miss H-Hope! He also is one of G-God's creatures."

"He doesn't look it."

"Tut, tut! We m-mustn't be uncharitable. To the Eskimo, p-probably, we ourselves d-don't look p-prepossessing."

"Well, I don't see what he wants to come here for."

"He wants to r-restore a n-nervous system shattered by t-too great attention to d-duty. As I did m-myself, Miss H-Hope. And so d-desirous is he of s-seclusion, poor man, that he is p-paying for his c-cabin in advance, at an increased r-rate."

Helen gave up; something told her that this last argument would have more weight with her host than any she could advance. She helped Jim stow the provender in the knapsack, and swung off with him again along the forest path; and as soon as they rounded the first bend the fat man vanished again from her mind.

It was one of those mornings made for the joy of vigorous living—for deep breathing, hard tramping, shoulder to shoulder comradeship, and spontaneous laughter. The two breasted the steep trails like old companions in adventure; and indeed they had plunged into friendship with the giant strides of youth and sympathy, and were already deep in understanding.

They liked the same things, and—more important—laughed at the same things; and although they were of vastly different natures, even their differences had a subtle charm. Youth, Maytime in the woods, mountain trails fringed with maidenhair to climb, a slim hand inside a strong hand at the rough places—

They lunched in a delicious nook of the ravine, where the greenery sloped steeply up on one side, and a crystal clear little stream slid steeply down on the other. Here, on a broad slab of rock, they made their fire; and the fragrance of the boiling

coffee and the sizzle of the sausages mounted to heaven in an aroma fit to make the angels' mouths water.

"Oh," said Helen, sighing and masticating at the same time, with equal enthusiasm. "This is absolutely a party. I never had such good eats, in such excellent society, in my whole previous life."

"Out of the fullness of the mouth the heart speaketh," observed Jim. "You have missed the delight of picnics, of youth, of falling in love, if you haven't added a crowning touch of silliness."

"How steep it is, and how still," said she, gazing up the ravine. "It goes up and up to the sky like a long green tunnel."

"The gorge rises," murmured Jim. Perhaps he was inclined to overdo the silliness a little, but he was very happy.

"Jim, you're disgusting."

"Susan, you're lovely. Do you know there's really no comparison between brown-eyed heroines and blue-eyed ones. I'll have to change the color scheme of my novel—drat you!"

"Drat yourself! Why can't you make a brunette that's strong enough to hold your interest?"

"It would take a female Samson to hold my interest when you're around. No two ways about it, Susan; you'll have to go home if I'm going to finish my novel."

"You certainly are inspired. What's the matter with your going home yourself and letting me stay?"

"Be your age, Susan. How can I go home if you stay?"

Helen arose hastily, impelled by that strange urge which drives women to run from what they desire.

"It's time for us both to go home. Come on, Jim; last one down's a blue monkey."

They scrambled down the ravine with laughter, with wild scamperings, with childish merriment, with sudden silences. For both of them the colony of the cabins had ceased to exist, and they were alone in the greenwood.

But when they came again within the familiar purlieus, the first thing that caught Helen's attention was the paunchy man, peering at them from behind a tree. At that her uneasiness returned, and she expressed again, in no uncertain terms, her disapproval of his person and presence.

"He's the most unpleasant, unattractive, untrustable man I ever saw," she said, "and he has shifty eyes, and a snubby

nose, and furtive ways, and a wart. And I think Clericus is insane to let him stay here, for he's a perfectly horrid thing!"

"I gather," said Jim reasonably, "that you don't like him. But what do you think he'll do, poison our porridge?"

"I think he'll rob us."

"How can he? I didn't bring my diamonds along, did you?"

Helen opened her lips to tell him of her recent acquisition, then remembered her vow of silence and closed them again.

But now a new specialized uneasiness was added to her vague distrust. She wondered if the pudgy man had somehow managed to hear of Clericus's heirloom.

"Let me come in awhile, Susan?" asked Jim, as they reached her little upward path.

"No, I think you've had enough of me for awhile," said she prudently, remembering the blonde's observant and inquisitive eyes. "I'm going to rest until dinner time."

She smiled at him, and went on up the path. It's a wise girl who knows just when to go away.

When she was inclosed in her little house, and had watched Hollis surreptitiously as he tramped off homeward through the trees, she went quickly to the cache where she had hidden Clericus's treasure. A hurried poking in the corners of the suit case failed to reveal it.

She turned everything out on the floor, shook the clothing, felt in all the pockets of the bag, but to no avail. Then she sat back on her heels and contemplated the results of her fruitless search with a sort of grim satisfaction.

Her misgiving was realized. The unpleasant stranger had stolen the diamond pendant.

VII

HELEN stopped only long enough to remove the stains of the day's adventure, and then set out, gleaming with determination, to interview Clericus. She found him, after some search, on the porch of the blonde's cabin, in earnest conversation with that effulgent lady. They seemed to be examining something which lay in Clericus's hand, over which both their heads were bent in absorbed contemplation.

"It ain't real!" the lady was saying incredulously.

Clericus's answer, owing to his low and

hesitating speech, and to the fact that his back was turned, was inaudible, but apparently impressive.

"My Gawd!" Mrs. Erroll commented. "Wouldn't that jar your foundations! Whereja get it?"

Clericus looked around, in his nervous way, before answering, and perceived Helen standing hesitant in the path. At once he put the object of interest into his pocket, and hurried toward her with an air of definitely closing the other interview.

"Were you l-looking for me, Miss Hope?" he asked.

"Yes, I was," said Helen, in a low but intense voice. "Mr. Agnew, while I was out to-day, some one came to my cabin and stole the diamond pendant!"

There could be no doubt that Clericus was profoundly and painfully impressed by this news. He started, his jaw dropped, and into the shadowy eyes behind the dark glasses there came a sudden gleam, that appeared—for all its low visibility—very like rage. But before he spoke he took her elbow and conducted her well out of ear-shot of the lady on the porch.

"You don't t-tell me!" he said then, in an excited voice. "Are you c-certain? There's no mistake?"

"Absolutely none. There's only one place where it could be, and I've turned everything out of there. Mr. Agnew, I told you that fat man was a bad man. I knew him for a criminal just to look at him."

"Sh! Not so l-loud!" said Clericus nervously. "I as-sure you, my dear Miss H-Hope, you're quite wr-rong. I have n-no reason to believe him anything but an estimable c-citizen. He knows a g-great many of the c-clergy, and he p-pays very g-generously. S-some one has done you a wr-rong, a very great wr-rong, Miss Hope; but not that g-gentleman."

"I'd like to know who, then," said Helen, with incredulous scorn. "You, perhaps?"

"No, n-not I," answered Clericus earnestly. "But, b-believe me, n-not he. Give me t-time, and I'll f-find out. I'll g-get it back for you, Miss H-Hope. J-just leave it to me, and g-give me a little t-time. And—one more f-favor, Miss Hope—may I ask you n-not to s-speak of the matter to any one? It is so p-painful, so d-dis-tressing, it might be so unjust to some innocent p-person to have it known—I b-beg

you, Miss Hope, s-say nothing—n-nothing at all!"

As usual, his high-minded, unpractical earnestness aroused Helen's sympathy, and although her impulse had been to shout the pudgy man's infamy aloud from the bungalow top, she yielded the point. Clericus thanked her with a warmth which she found very touching, and she took her way homeward, perplexed and uneasy.

Dinner that night was not the joyous event she had anticipated. Although Jim Hollis was as prompt—very dressy too, in a clean tan-colored shirt that brought out his dark, ugly handsomeness to excellent advantage—and although the look of welcome he gave her was certainly a distinguished achievement for a woman-hater, she could not give her mind to enjoying his society properly because of the appreciative staring of Mrs. Rosalie Erroll and the gimlet glances of Mrs. Tipton.

Moreover, her mood had been dampened by the discovery of the theft of the pendant, which now seemed to cast a sinister backward light on the loss of her watch: and her mind was poisoned toward the company by the certainty that a criminal lurked in its midst, and a doubt as to which individual it was.

She looked, of course, long and coldly at the pudgy man. He was introduced by Clericus as Mr. Macomber, of Glens Falls, and to this rather sketchy scenario he added, of his own motion, the facts that he was in the hardware business; that he was a Rotarian, and that he had been "workin' like a slave an' busted down under it."

The manner with which he imparted these statistics was certainly lacking in polish. He had a regrettable tendency to confuse the claims of nourishment and of eloquence, which hampered his diction considerably; and when he had occasion to gesticulate, he did so with a fork heavily laden with food.

Yet, viewed without prejudice, there was certainly nothing sinister about his expression. Rather, when he had rapidly dispatched the food before him, and, relaxed, sat affectionately embracing his embonpoint, he gave the impression of a kindly burgher cherishing a household pet by his fireside. It was really unreasonable to suspect him of guile.

Helen considered the rest of the company.

The conversation was running, as con-

versations sometimes will, even in the Forest of Arden, on money.

It was the dancing partners, Tessie and Terry, who had pursued it thither; Arcadian as were their diversions, they were not above practical considerations.

The handsome male partner—who appeared at dinner fully clad, even to varnish on the finger nails and mascara on the eyelashes—talked in a mincing, gentlemanly voice of contracts and rates.

"When we appeared on the Palace circuit—sweetie and I," he said, including his coadjutor with a languishing glance through the mascara thicket, "we got excellent terms—really lovely terms. A thousand a week, wasn't it, sweetie?"

"Yes; but did we get it?" inquired the female partner, whose conversational style was of a more robust order. "Ask me! I'll tell the bobtailed world we didn't. We hadda pay ten per to the agency, an' a rake off to the manager of every theater, an' furnish the make-up an' costumes."

"I shouldn't think," observed Mrs. Tipton acidly, "that that last item would cost you much."

"No, I sh'd say not!" added Mrs. Erroll. Where the dancing lady was concerned, she and the widow saw eye to jaundiced eye. "Not with beads as cheap as they are now."

"Is that so!" retorted Tessie, whose bobbed hair was a warm red, and whose temper matched it neatly. "I thought you got yours at the ten-cent store. I'll tell you right now, an' you can put it in the paper if you wanta, my costume cost six hundred dollars."

"My gosh, a hundred dollars an inch!" exclaimed Mrs. Erroll, rolling her large light eyes. "I'm afraid you got stung, deary!"

Mrs. Tipton gave a small shrill giggle, which exploded unamiably through her nose.

"Ladies, l-ladies!" said Clericus pacifically. "'Let d-dogs d-delight to b-bark and b-bite,' as the hymn says. 'Your l-little hands were never made to t-tear each other's eyes.'"

The scientist leaned toward the lady dancer with warm interest. The presence of attractive young women seemed always to have a tendency to make him less scientific, and it was Tessie who now melted the intellectual crust.

"I'd like to see you in your costume,"

he said confidentially. "I'll bet you look swell."

She smiled warmly at him, with a flash of clean white teeth. All that was visible of her—which was no mean trifle, even at dinner—looked very clean and healthy.

"You ain't said the half of it," she returned. "I'd knock the eyes out of a potato. Come an' see the new act when we put it on in the fall; it's goin' to be a hum-dinger."

Terry intervened, looking coldly at the man of learning.

"It will be lovely; a dream," he said; "but we open in a place too remote, I fear, to be available to Mr.—er—" His voice trailed off in a slightly insulting drawl.

"Oh, I don't know," said the scientist airily. "I could do a little traveling myself in a good cause. Never can tell what you can do till you try, can you, girly?" He winked jocosely at Tessie.

Helen looked at him with a searching scrutiny. Of course even Jove may nod, but this was almost snoring.

"I thought," said Terry, politely offensive, "that scholarship wasn't—er—recuperative enough to entail a great deal of locomotion."

"I guess you mean remunerative," said the scholar haughtily; "and I guess you don't know what you're talking about. Scholars have ways of laying their hands on a little ready cash, too, if they want it." He winked again at the lady of his admiration.

Helen gazed at him with eyes sharpened by suspicion. It had always seemed improbable that any one could be as scholarly as this scholar looked; and this talk of money— She suddenly remembered that she had been with him only a little while before she discovered the loss of her watch.

"I suppose you lay your hands on anything you want," Terry remarked unpleasantly.

"Pretty much," said Professor Babcock affably. "Enough to buy a flower or so for a little lady, eh? What do you like on the opening night, girly—roses?"

"Lobsters," answered Tessie promptly. "Broiled live. An' a diamond or two stuck in each claw—each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer, as the song says—you get the idea?"

The scientist laughed heartily at her roguish glance.

"You like sparklers, eh?" he remarked approvingly. "Well, I never saw a little lady that didn't. Maybe I could make good with one of those, too."

Helen glanced quickly around the table. Nobody seemed particularly struck by this remark—not even Clericus, who might have been awake to its significance. Jim was looking warmly at her, the two widows were looking coldly at the dancer, the pudgy man was looking drowsily and affectionately at his domestic pet, Clericus was looking benignantly at everybody.

She was alone in vigilance, then. Well, she would not fail.

When the company dispersed she found Jim at her elbow, proposing a stroll. But she had sterner business on hand than strolling through the forest glades in the twilight. She put him off, after some difficulty, with the excuse that the two widows were already gossiping, and went on her way alone.

The scientist, whose further attendance on the dancing lady had been pointedly discouraged by her muscular partner, had returned to his cabin while Helen was dealing with Jim. Dusk was falling thickly, and as the lady sleuth stole softly along the path the yellow gleam of the scientist's lamp pricked through his dark doorway.

She could see him moving about inside. Now he closed the door; now he went to the window and dropped the curtain; but the curtains of these sylvan nests were simple slabs of unbleached muslin, not remarkable for finesse or subtlety, and there was a wide gap at each side through which she could see nicely.

She stole close to the window, and—feeling like scum, yet fortified by a strong sense of responsibility to the community—peeped in.

The scientist had taken off his scholarly coat—that dark and formal garment which lent him an almost undertakerish dignity—and appeared in red and white striped shirt sleeves, which altered his appearance astonishingly. With the coat, he had shed whatever scholarly bearing his interview with the dancer had left him; even his trousers were subtly affected by the change, and now looked like the trousers of a book-maker or an auctioneer.

He rubbed his fingers through his scholarly gray hair, and it stood up rakishly, with a raffish and dissipated look. Then, with a singularly unintellectual gesture, he

expectorated on his hands, seized the box of scientific books, trundled it into the middle of the room, took off the lid—which was lightly secured by a bent nail or two—and delved inside.

Helen watched, fascinated. With deft and rapid movements the geologist was mining, from his box of books, strange articles.

First he took out, and set carefully on the table, several small bottles, and after that a set of small pointed tools and a flat block such as etchers and engravers use. Was the scientist an artist? If so, why was he so secretive about it?

Next, with a grunt of effort, he lifted out a black object made of some heavy metal, with large screws and rollers that gleamed faintly in the lamplight, and hoisted that also onto the table. It looked rather like an old-fashioned hand printing press. A maker of rare books, perhaps.

Lastly he took out some bundles of paper—paper cut in oblongs, of a vaguely familiar green shade—and ranged them beside the press.

All the time, as he worked, he had been shooting restless glances about him, over his shoulders, into the corners, at the door. Plainly here was a scientist who followed his science with an uneasy mind.

Now, suddenly, an acute misgiving seemed to seize him. He dropped the last bundle of green papers, and walked, with a rapid stealthy step, to the window.

His movement so took Helen by surprise that, if she had not been keyed for action, it would have overtaken her completely. As it was, she had just time to slip around the corner of the cabin before he brought his face into the rift between the curtain and the windowpane.

But as she scampered she trod—like a Fenimore Cooper Indian—on a dry twig, which cracked with the report of a small firecracker. That, she well knew, would bring him to the door, and she flew along the path like a startled rabbit, and had just time to crouch behind a boulder before the latch clicked.

Darkness, and the protective coloration of her raiment, favored her, and the fact that the scientist feared to leave the implements of his science behind, saved her from pursuit. He stood for a minute peering into the darkness, muttered, in an unscholarly tone, "Hell!" and then closed the door.

Helen, retreating with a fast beating heart to her own fortress, was further startled by the sight of another stealthy figure moving away from the cabin on the other side. Even in the dim light she recognized it. It was the pudgy man's.

VIII

THERE is nothing like a good brisk germ of suspicion to alter the character of one's entire mental crop. New shoots were springing up everywhere in Helen's mind, twining themselves about every prop in sight.

There was certainly something strange about the scientist; there was certainly something strange about the fat man. Indeed, if you came to think of it, there was a strangeness about everybody in the community except Clericus and Jim and herself.

After all, why should people bury themselves in remote mountain fastnesses if they hadn't some cause for concealment? Hair? *Pish!* Sorrow? *Tush!* Specimens? *Bah!*

She was revolving these misdoubtings as, on a gray morning, she strolled along the broad path which was the main artery of the sylvan metropolis. She was going fishing; she had borrowed rod and tackle from Clericus, and was aiming for the lake in the glen.

As she neared Jim's cabin she slackened her pace. She was hoping that he would have an impulse to go fishing, too, but, since neither pride nor conscience would allow her to intrude herself upon his work, she was forced to trust to the power of suggestion. She walked as slowly as she could, carrying her rod on her shoulder like a color sergeant.

But when she came to the junction of his path with the main one, she was surprised to see two dark figures in close conference behind a tree; and when she reached the tree she was more surprised to find that they were Clericus and Jim.

They had their heads together in absorbed contemplation of something small and glittering, something remarkably like a jewel; and to complete her amazement, they jumped apart like conspirators at the sound of her approach.

Both of them looked at her in unmistakable confusion. Clericus turned away to avoid her eyes, and Jim, with a hurried mutter of "Fix it up later," thrust the

object of interest into his pocket with a mien of guilt.

Helen could make nothing of this. Had Clericus another heirloom to dispose of? It seemed unlikely, and yet the likeliest explanation.

But in that case, why should Jim conceal his dealings with such a hangdog air? Why should he avoid her eyes as if he had been caught in a crime? She waited a moment for one of them to offer an explanation, for the transaction seemed too obvious to be ignored. But beyond uneasy shiftings and hemmings, neither man made any attempt to rise to the situation, and she had to take it in hand herself.

"Well!" she said brightly. "All at the trysting tree! What's in the wind to-day, Robin Hood?"

"Wh-why do you address m-me by that n-name?" inquired Clericus, uneasily. "Surely there's nothing in c-common between the c-cloth and b-banditry!"

"Oh, surely not! It just struck me that you two looked like Robin Hood and Little John hatching a plot. Nothing personal intended."

"Of course not," agreed Jim. "You look like Maid Marian yourself. What are you going fishing for?"

Helen met his uneasy eyes, and had an impish impulse. "Jewels," she answered.

The word acted as a painful spur on both of them. Clericus gave a sickly smile and fidgeted with his hat, and Jim, flushing deeply, stuck his hand into the guilty pocket and turned away toward his cabin.

"Great day, isn't it?" he said uncomfortably. "Wish I had time to go fishing. Got to work like a sockdologer to-day. So long."

Clericus departed, too, with an uneasy mumble; and Helen went on her way, a new shadow on her uncomfortable morning. It was unnecessary, and a little unkind, that Jim should make mysteries.

It seemed more unkind than it would have if the relation between them had not been so nebulous. If they had been less to each other she would not have cared; if they had been more she would have scolded him for having secrets. As it was, everything was wrong, and she didn't care the least bit about fishing.

She was going to the glen by the easiest route—lacking the ambition to scramble over the ridge as she had done the first time—and this led her past the cabin of the

semiblonde. It needed no microscope to discern its tenant on the porch, airing her varied hair.

So desperate was Helen's need of diversion that she decided to stop and make a call. She smiled as she sent a yodel of announcement up the path, thinking of the sensation her coming would create, for hitherto her social attitude toward the blonde had always been that of the fleeing bird.

She did, indeed, create a commotion, but not of the kind she had anticipated. Mrs. Erroll jumped, squealed, and turned a large pink moon of agitation over her shoulders. At the same time she thrust some object, with panic haste, inside the cascading ruffles of her nearly pink negligee.

"My Gawd, deary!" she gasped. "You 'most turned my lipstick white. Whadja holler like that for?"

"The last time I came on you unexpectedly," Helen pointed out, a little ruffled, "you objected because I didn't warn you. You seem to be awfully jumpy."

Mrs. Erroll sat back and fanned herself with a wispy chiffon handkerchief. "I ain't usually, but gosh, to be sittin' here thinkin' about nothin' at all"—she felt uneasily of the object concealed in her bosom—"an' then to have somebody give a war-whoop right down the back o' your neck, why, that 'd make any lady spring some. You'll hafta excuse me. I'll get a chair if you're gonna stop."

"No, thank you; don't bother. I'm going fishing." Helen turned away dispiritedly, even this resource failing her.

But Mrs. Erroll's momentary unease was no match for her well-developed social instincts.

"Oh, don't go, deary!" she protested. "Siddown. Here; the step's real comf'terble if you jam a coupla pillows around the old shape. Less have a good old talk. Where you been lately?"

"Well, we met yesterday at dinner. This morning I went to breakfast before you were up—before anybody was, in fact, except the dancers."

"Ah! There's a party to write home about!" Mrs. Erroll drew a long breath, and settled into her conversational stride. "Whadja think o' that for nerve? Wouldn't it put crimps into a brass monkey?"

"They certainly do have nerve," Helen

agreed. "I was watching them yesterday, and she flung herself right through the air like a flying squirrel. If he'd missed her she'd have broken a bone or two; but I was the only scared one."

"Huh, that's nothin'. I seen dancers that could make her look like a mummy. When I say nerve I mean *nerve*. I mean her bringin' her sweetie right into elegant society like this, and shakin' him in our faces as if he was as respectable as a dishrag. I'm no Puritan, but I do say the place for goin's on like that is in the home."

"Perhaps they are perfectly respectable," said Helen, although she had been getting quite a kick from the conviction that the handsome pair was tinged with scarlet. "Probably they haven't any thought but their art."

"Prob'ly they haven't," sniffed the blonde. "An' prob'ly I'm a stuffed string bean with Russian dressin'."

"Well, at all events they don't do anybody any harm."

"They don't, don't they? Why, that hussy 'd vamp the radiator off'n a motor hearse. She's kidnagin' the poor professor right under your beezee."

"Is she? Well, she's welcome to him."

"Deary, I'm surprised at you! I s'pose if you saw a man-eatin' shark swallowin' a helpless babe, you'd say, 'Well, the poor fish's hungry!'"

"I never noticed much in common between Professor Babcock and a helpless babe."

"When you been married as many times as I have, you'll know all men are helpless babes. The older the helplesser. The poor prof's no chicken now; put ten years more on him, an' that harpy 'd have his scalp."

"All the men I know," remarked Helen, scuffing moodily at the pine needles, "seem pretty well able to take care of themselves."

"What," said Mrs. Erroll, looking at her shrewdly, "the author bitin' your ear already?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Helen coldly. "I've nothing to do with Mr. Hollis."

Then, catching the baby blue stare fixed on her with candid curiosity, she added artfully: "There goes the professor now. I wonder if he's going to take the dancer out after specimens?"

Mrs. Erroll arose precipitately, with a

movement that said: Let the professor take her over this pink negligee! But, as she moved forward a step, the something which she had secreted in her raiment shot down beneath the loose pink billows, and landed on the floor with a little metallic rattle.

Helen, who had risen also, glanced down. Mrs. Erroll glanced down, too, and hurriedly covered the object with a dingy pink slipper, but not before the girl's eye caught an unmistakable glint of diamonds.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed Mrs. Erroll, with a flustered attempt to draw another herring across the trail. "I b'lieve he's goin' to see Mrs. Tipton! She ain't a bad girl at all, that one, if she wasn't such a heller for piety."

Helen went down the steps, murmuring a farewell. She was more perplexed and disturbed than ever. Was the entire camp playing "Button, button, who's got the button," with her pendant?

The pond was still and silvery in the gray light. The flies, alighting, spread their ripples in almost unbroken circles on its smooth surface, and she cast her fabricated fly in careful imitation.

The fish rose briskly, and it was only a few minutes before she had hooked a fine energetic trout. But she was never an ardent sportswoman, and to-day she lacked the high spirits which alone could give her callousness for killing. She unhooked the pretty speckled thing, and threw it back into the water, and having reeled in her line, she did not let it out again.

She did not like this glen. It was here, she thought, that she had lost her beloved watch; here that she had suffered for a wary hour the saga of the hair and the husbands; here that the thunderstorm had overtaken her on a day which seemed, in retrospect, so much happier than this one that she could not bear to think of it.

She suddenly decided that the place was unendurable. And when Helen thought a place unendurable she did not linger in it; she was not one to practice endurance simply because it was painful. She picked up her equipment and started on.

Sunshine in the woods is one thing; it filters between the branches, it lies in vivid dapples on the path, it gilds the distant aisles with enchantment. And rain in the woods is another thing; it patters companionably on the poncho, it makes unexpected and delightful havens of the little vaults under the thick leaves.

But a gray day in the woods is something else again. Overhead there is nothing but grayness, round about nothing but grayness; the eye finds nothing to follow but a misty vista of gray invisibility; and, if there is grayness in the mind as well, the outlook is dreary indeed.

Helen strayed along the main avenue, with which—preferring the bypaths—she had never made acquaintance beyond the blonde's cabin. It did not lead anywhere in particular, but neither, to-day, did any other path.

Some little care had been expended on clearing and widening it; it was roofed like a cathedral nave, with interlacing pine boughs; it opened out here and there in clear weather into spaces where one could see across the valley, and was altogether a path which an unprejudiced mind would have found highly alluring.

But to Helen's mood it now was flat and unprofitable, and when she had followed it a little way she stopped out of sheer boredom, unable to decide whether it were worse to go on or go home.

As she stood, uncertain, in the pathway, she heard voices a little way before her, upraised in a stress of emotion. The sound was unprecedented in this solitude; it indicated danger or distress.

She ran forward in quick response, but at the next turn she came upon a scene which brought her to standstill, speechless. A tall, sturdy oak tree stood, proudly detached, in a small clearing, and against its trunk, like a very healthy clinging vine, the dancing lady was leaning her straight back as she gazed with an expression of scornful wrath up into its foliage.

On one of its branches, like a large and ungainly parasite, Professor Babcock sat, unhappily huddled.

"Get up or get down, can't you?" Tessie was exclaiming. "You don't want to set there all day, like a bloomin' woodpecker, do you?"

"I tell you I c-can't!" ejaculated the scientist, with an unscientific quaver. "I c-can't move. My trousers are caught!"

"Uncatch 'em!" advised the lady impatiently. "They ain't nailed there, are they? Give a yank, man!"

"That's easier to say than do," remarked the scientist bitterly. "They aren't your trousers."

"If they were," she retorted, "I wouldn't keep 'em up there."

"That sounds well from you. Who was it sent me up this damn' tree?"

"Well, who was it that wanted to go? Who said that wad o' green stuff up there was mistletoe?"

"I wouldn't 'a' thought of going if you hadn't dared me to."

"Oh, no! You didn't want to go. 'Twasn't you that made me promise to give you a kiss for every berry."

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed the goaded scientist. "I wish to thunder I'd never seen the confounded tree."

"Come down, then. Be a man. Yank."

The scholar yanked, half-heartedly, but the movement disturbed his uncertain equilibrium to an alarming extent, and he uttered a choked squawk, the note of a crow with laryngitis. Indeed, he was not unlike an unusually large and unattractive crow, as he sat there croaking and flapping in his long black coat.

"I ca-an't!" he cawed. "I'll fa-all!"

Tessie gave a short and scornful hoot.

"I'll come up and get you, then. Gosh, I wish we had a movie photographer here. It 'd make a grand subject: Scientific Guy Pursues Study of Mistletoe; or, Save Our Wild Birds! You're a wild bird, I don't think—goin' gunnin' after kiss berries, an' gettin' rescued by a skirt!"

Her description of herself was inaccurate, for she was wearing the one-piece bathing suit which appeared to be the unofficial uniform of her art, in which the skirt was nonexistent, and all the rest vestigial. But there was no vagueness about her intention, for she immediately jumped for a low-hanging branch, grappled it with her four handsome limbs, and began to swing herself up, monkey fashion, toward the captive scholar.

He, on his part, sat precariously perched, twittering with alarm as his uneasy balance was disturbed by her impetuous approach, flapping his black wings in his effort to get a firmer grip. It made a singular tableau, of which the scientific interest was perhaps less strong than the human.

All this time, so great had been the absorption of the actors in their drama, Helen had stood unperceived at the turn of the path; she had herself been too surprised to claim their attention at first, and now it seemed to her that the situation was both too tense and too delicate for any intrusion to be opportune.

At the same time it was hardly safe to go away and leave them both aloft. Suppose the dancer should stick, too, then who would summon help? She drew back a little into the greenery, and waited.

"Now gimme your mitt," directed Tessie, when she had reached the branch below. "Your *mitt*, I said. Leggo the branch. My Gawd, the guy's deaf as well as dumb. Leggo, saphead!"

"I c-can't let go," complained the quavering scholar.

"Then howja think I'm gonna get you down? Want me to open my mouth an' let you fall in? Here, you gimme your fist, or I'll knock you off with a good sock on the jaw!"

Thus encouraged, the scientist timidly extended one shaky hand, which the dancer grasped firmly. Standing easily on the lower branch, she began to walk backward to the trunk, pulling at her beneficiary.

"C'mon, now," she encouraged him. "Give your hand to mamma, an' we'll go by-by. C'mon, you silly ass. Get a move on."

"I can't move, I tell you!" yammered the scientist. "My pants are stuck!"

"Well, unstick 'em, for Gawd's sake!" exclaimed his exasperated rescuer. "My sacred chewing gum, to think a jellyfish like you should wear pants!"

"You wait till I get down, and I'll show you if I'm a man or not!" flared the baited prisoner.

"If you ever get down, kid, you'll never show me nothin' but your rear view walkin' home. I've had enough o' you. C'mon, now, yank yourself loose."

"I c-can't!" cawed the scientist again.

"I wisht to Gawd I had a pin," muttered the exasperated lady errant. She glanced about her swiftly; there was certainly no foothold for a pin on her scant apparel, and oaks do not produce thorns; but she was resourceful.

Reaching up with a gesture as quick as a lizard's, she nipped the fleshy nether portion of the professor's thigh in a severe pinch.

Taken unawares, he arose rapidly, with a yelp of astonishment and pain, and his trousers freed themselves with a rending sound from the snag that held them.

The lady steadied him with a strong hand, and he was soon hitching along the branch for freedom.

"There, now we're off," said his rescuer.

"Plant your foot here. Step down, you goofer. Now here, now here—ouch, not on my lunch-hooks! There, now you only gotta let yourself go an' your dogs 'll pull you down."

She was right; he could not circumvent gravity, and he was soon on the ground, but a sad wreck of the scholarly figure that had started out gallivanting a little while before. His hands and face were scratched by unfriendly twigs, his intellectual gray hair stood erect and wild, his intellectual glasses had stuck somewhere in the tree, and through the void in his trousers left by his contact with the detaining snag a white flag of truce projected.

Helen, who had been about to mention her presence, thought better of her intention, and charitably withdrew a little deeper into the shrubbery.

"Here you are, what's left o' you," remarked Tessie heartlessly. "Some grand little human fly, I'll say. Won't the old dames squawk when I tell 'em about it!"

The scholar, who was busy rearranging his raiment and the remnants of his dignity, stopped and stared at her in downright horror.

"You aren't—you aren't going to tell this!" he faltered.

"Who says I ain't?" inquired the lady, with relish. "Gosh, it's the only funny thing's happened since I struck this isolation camp. Sort o' got my goat at first, but now I see how funny it is—you planted in the tree like a big apple, me shakin' the branch to make you fall—an' when the pants bust, down comes baby, cradle an' all!"

Her healthy red mouth suddenly opened wide to emit a shout of heartfelt mirth.

The scientist drew out his handkerchief and wiped his agitated brow.

"Say—look here—it was nothin' like that!" he protested. "And, anyway, I don't want the whole crowd to hear about it. Say, Tessie, lay off on it, will you?"

"Not much I won't. Why, it's the best laugh I had since our janitor got lockjaw."

"But, Tessie, you'll make me look so damn silly!"

"You bet I will, Lionel. But not a patch on what you really looked, flappin' an' singin' like a little canary bird."

"Say, Tessie, you wouldn't! Oh, go on, Tessie—say you won't!"

A sudden glint of practical forethought brightened Tessie's eye.

"What 'll you gimme not to?" she inquired.

"What do you want?"

"Well, you know what I told you about my favorite song—the hours I spent with thee, dear heart, are like a string o' pearls to me—huh?"

"Heck, Tessie; you wouldn't expect a whole string?"

"Oh, no; just givin' you the idea in a poetic way. I'll let you down easy, Lionel; some pretty trifle like that pendant you was tellin' me about—"

Helen started. The pendant again!

"Damn it! Well, let's get the thing straight," said the professor gloomily. "If I give you a jewel, you promise to keep your mouth shut. Is that clear?"

"You said it, Lionel. If the jool's a good one, you couldn't pry my trap open with a crowbar. But I like my pearls hot, right off the oyster; shall we say by dinner time to-night?"

"Oh, Tessie, to-night? Have a heart!"

"I got one, Lionel. It tells me that sometimes, in this crool world, gents fold their tents at night like the whozits, leavin' no address. There's no time like the present. Dinner time, huh? That's understood in this gentleman's agreement between thou an' I?"

"I suppose so," he agreed sulkily.

"All right, then, let's mosey. Time to page the cows for the afternoon milkin'."

They moseyed forthwith, the lady bright with the realization of a good deed done, the knight very glum with a precautionary hand guarding the rift in his nether garments. Neither spoke any more; the day's philandering seemed done.

Helen, emerging from her retirement, regarded the path with even less enthusiasm than before. It could lead nowhere but to woods as dull as these, if not duller, and she had not the heart to pursue it farther. She decided to give up the rest of her dreamy pleasure jaunt, and turned back again.

Like the pessimistic person who had nowhere to go but out, and nowhere to come but back, she could think of no resource but her cabin. She set her dispirited face toward it, wondering what she should do when she got there.

Although she had done nothing, she was very tired; her back ached; her boots hurt her; and the fishing rod kept tangling its flexible tip in the branches. Life present-

ed itself as a vale of tears, undried and probably undryable.

The rod, at least, need not encumber her long, since she was done with fishing. She turned in at the main cabin to return it, and to tell Clericus not to save a place for her catch on the menu.

Luncheon preparations were in progress; she heard the voices of the clerical pair in the kitchen; and it suddenly struck her as singular that she had never seen Mrs. Clericus, nor heard aught of her except this acrimonious eloquence in invisible regions. Surely Mrs. Clericus's domestic duties did not occupy all her waking hours.

Was it that she had her hair in curlers? But perpetual curlers were untenable; no one would wear curlers except for the purpose of sometimes being seen curled. Perhaps she was a misanthrope.

"I tell you," the woman's sharp voice was saying, "I got as good a right to it as you."

Clericus answered, low and pacific: "I was g-going to d-divide with you."

"Oh, yes, you were g-going to d-divide!" mocked the other. "Fat chance! If you did, I'd get the rind. I'm wise to your ways."

Helen was shocked. The wife of a clergyman—retired, to be sure, but still valid—speaking in the jargon of the streets, and gibing at her husband's infirmity! It was incredible. Perhaps Clericus had to keep her in the closet in self-defense, poor man.

"Well, b-business is b-business," said Clericus. "It's sold n-now, and that's the end."

"It is not," said Mrs. Clericus viciously. "I'll tell the cockeyed world it's not."

"I'd like to know why n-not," observed the clergyman. "It's my p-pendant."

"It's your granny!" retorted his lady. "We'll see about that. Hog!"

Helen dropped the rod noiselessly, and tiptoed down the porch steps. She was horrified. That ubiquitous pendant now was the occasion of a clerical lady calling her husband a hog!

The thing carried a curse with it, or at least bad language. There was something drastically wrong about it, like the more famous Hope diamond.

As she hurried away, she glanced anxiously over her shoulder to see if poor Clericus had observed her, and must bear the added embarrassment of guessing that she

had overheard. To her relief the kitchen window was empty.

But, as she went to turn back, her quick eye caught a slight stir beneath the window, and a second glance showed her a figure crouched in the shelter of the shrubbery. It was the fat man.

That fat man was almost as pervasive as the pendant. He seemed to be everywhere.

IX

THE day dragged heavily on. It was so long a day that it has to be dealt with in another chapter.

In the afternoon Helen wearied of her cabin, where the books lent her by Jim seemed the dullest ever perpetrated by mortal pen, and wandered out, around the shoulder of the mountain. She wearied of that, and wandered back again. Nothing happened—nothing at all.

Nobody moved; everybody seemed to have been laid away in lavender to keep for a future generation. Even the gray clouds were too inert and unenterprising to resolve themselves into rain.

At last, after interminable æons, it was dinner time. She went punctually to the clubhouse, thankful for even so small a distraction.

Small, do I say? On a gray day in the woods dinner becomes epochal, cosmic; it is an event to stop the music of the spheres.

All the other denizens rushed to it with equal promptness, weighed down as she was by the tedium of the long day. The arrival of the steaming pea soup found a board without a single vacancy.

Helen shot a swift glance at Jim Hollis as she took her place, and caught his eyes in time to see them swerve away from her in uneasy self-consciousness. Her own unease, which had started to fly away at sight of him, returned augmented.

Something was distinctly wrong in her world beside the grayness of the weather and the longness of the day. What was Jim concealing from her?

What was the dark secret between him and Clericus? What was the meaning of all this creeping and eavesdropping, and all this concealed flashing of mysterious jewels? And where was her pendant?

Emerging from her unhappy abstraction enough to observe her neighbors, she saw elements of discomfort in other auras than her own. Opposite her sat the professor.

He had transferred himself a day or two ago to a place at the side of the debonair dancer—in the face of strong opposition from the two widows, grass and sod—and now was separated from the companion of his recent adventure only by a high wall of glassy constraint.

This wall Tessie, the dauntless acrobat, had once set herself to scale, thereby rendering it distinctly visible to all the rest of the company.

"Well, proffy, that was cert'n'y a nice walk we had," she remarked brightly. "Nothin' like takin' the dogs out to give you an appetite."

"Did you walk far?" asked Mrs. Tipton.

"Well, not so far flat," returned Tessie, "but up—say, you'd oughta seen us! Aviation's nothin' to it."

"What, you don't mean to say you been mountain climbin'!" exclaimed Mrs. Erroll, with a strong suggestion in her tone of "at your age!"

"Ask the professor what we climbed," said Tessie. "I'll say for him, he climbed like a rambler rose. A crimson one," she added, with a bright, malicious glance at her highly colored neighbor.

That unhappy man avoided her glance and her implications. "Nice weather we had to-day," he remarked with an attempt at genial detachment, to the company at large.

"If you don't care what you say," sniffed Mrs. Erroll. "Nice weather for ambiguns, or whatever you call them creatures that can be either wet or dry."

"You mean politicians—ha, ha!" vociferated Professor Babcock, with mirth more robust than his witticism.

Nobody laughed, Helen and Jim being too distraught, the fat man too busy eating, and the widows—who usually returned a ready response to his smallest jest—too much on the warpath. Clericus, who was bustling about waiting on the table in his simple early Christian way, attempted to smooth the situation.

"I'm sure, Miss T-Tessie, wherever you w-went, you must have found a w-walk in the p-professor's company p-profitable."

"Well, I dunno," answered Tessie. "I was hopin' for awhile it would be, but now it don't look so good. How 'bout it, Lionel? Did I think I was clinkin' to a sturdy oak when it was really a broken reed?"

"Now, Tessie," murmured the scientist, "it 'll be all right. Don't you worry."

"Somebody's got to worry, proffy. I dunno just what I'd oughta do about it; I'm up a tree. You advise me—you'd oughta know how that feels."

"Tessie—now, Tessie!" protested the scholar, acutely miserable.

"Lionel—now, Lionel!" mocked the dancer. "Jever hear the fairy tale about the two girl talkers, one spoutin' toads an' one spoutin' di'monds and pearls? Wonder which I am? You tell me, Lionel; you're the man higher up."

"Lionel!" interrupted Mrs. Erroll crossly. "Whatja call him that for?"

"Why, dontcha think it makes a pretty name—Lionel Babcock?" said Tessie, wide-eyed.

"Lionel Tripe!" sniffed the blonde. "His name's Joseph Jeremiah."

"It 'll be Dennis before I get through with him," menaced Tessie sweetly, "if he forgets my favorite song, an' the hours he spent with me, dear heart."

Terry, who all this time had been growing increasingly restive, now entered the conversation with a frown on his well-plucked eyebrows.

"Let me get this," he said in his mincing voice, whose delicacy was somewhat offset by the hunching of a muscular shoulder; "is this guy going to give you pearls, sweetie?"

"Ask dad; he knows," returned Tessie, cocking her impudent red head at the scientist.

"I'm going to," said Terry, delicately laying a clenched fist on the table. "I'm going to stop him on the avenue and ask him. How about to-night, Mr. Professor, on the way home? Shall I ask you then—hey?"

"To-night—oh, to-night—why, to-night I expect to be busy," twittered Babcock.

"I—I've got an engagement, Mr. Terry."

"With who?"

"With—with the Rev. Agnew. A—a very important engagement."

"I'll see you subsequent, then," promised Terry, with his unfailing refinement. "Don't forget, you got another posterior engagement."

"I'll see you first, Lionel," murmured Tessie, "an' if we have a nice, congenial conversation it 'll be all right with the boy friend. Just don't forget about those hours that were like a string o' mistletoe berries."

A pregnant silence fell, and in the midst

of it Helen rose to depart. She was too depressed and out of sorts for even dinner to be a solace; and Tessie's Arcadian affairs of the heart were powerless to make her forget Jim's averted eyes. She murmured an excuse and a good night, and slipped out.

The evening was even drearier than the day. The depressed light was waning half-heartedly; the shadows were deep and sinister, the damp air brooded over the earth as if heavy with secrets.

Helen had been often enough to the movies to recognize it as a night made for the hatching of conspiracies, for stealthy movements and whisperings, for dark and hidden dealings. The thought of returning to her cabin suddenly became intolerable; if it had been dreary in the daylight, it would be eerie now; she would have to sit alone, staring at one of those dull books, and hearing, with her mind's ear, dark men, armed to the teeth, creeping about her door.

Yet she could not bring herself to rejoin the uncomfortable company in the main house. She wanted to be near human society, but not of it. So she crossed the main path, and seated herself on the damp pine carpet, among the thick shadows of the trees.

From this point of vantage she watched, idly, the group in the lamplighted room performing a dinner table scene that seemed arranged for her especial benefit. They acted, in their unconsciousness, with the finished ease of skilled performers.

No comédienne on the legitimate stage ever chumped tough beefsteak with the verve of Mrs. Rosalie Erroll; no jealous lover ever frowned more magnificently than Terry; no criminal ever gloomed more uneasily than Jim.

Especially was Helen struck by the admirable performance of Clericus, as he bobbed up from the table to minister to his hungry guests, sat down for a few hasty bites on his own account, and bobbed eagerly up again. With his silver hair and his nervously benevolent manner, he was the perfect presentment of the old family servitor who has stayed on without wages after all has been lost on the Stock Exchange.

The only incongruity was in his eyes, which should have been a pale and limpid blue, but were completely concealed by the dark glasses. Strange that he should have

to wear them even in that depleted light. His vision must be very much affected, poor man.

Her attention once centered upon him, she watched him closely. He was perfect.

As he moved about among the other actors, he sustained his part by distributing a heartening message here and there: to the blonde he gave a secret, kindly nod that was full of reassurance; to Jim he murmured a word in passing; as he refilled the scientist's coffee cup he leaned down and whispered something that was evidently for the scientific ear alone; for Tessie, looking alert and mischievous as a fox terrier, tried her best to overhear, and was baffled.

Leaving the simile of the actor, she thought of him as a man. What a remarkable host to find here in the wilderness; so courteous, so kindly, so uncomplaining under his terrible burden of bad health, financial anxiety, and an ill-bred, nagging wife!

She felt her eyes grow wet with sympathy, and then gazed at herself for a soppy sentimentalist. But in truth she had been on the verge of tears all this dismal day; her eyelids seemed as saturated with unshed moisture as the heavy clouds. She wondered what could be the matter with her.

The dessert was served and eaten, and the company began to straggle from the table. The two widows went out together, welded into sisterhood by the deportment of the dancer and the professor, and picked their way gingerly through the gathering darkness to the lodge of the blonde.

The fat man wandered out, with his aimless gait that was like the bobbing of a cork on slightly ruffled water, and disappeared around the corner of the house; but she had a feeling that he wasn't going far, for he always seemed as centrally located as a peach pit.

Next, Jim came loafing through the door, heavy shouldered and brooding, with his hands in his pockets and his chin on his chest. Helen felt an odd little shock as he appeared, which took her by surprise; she had known that she disliked him, since his singular behavior of the morning, but hadn't supposed it was to the breath snatching point.

Instead of going to his cabin, Jim stopped at the foot of the steps and stood there hovering, gloomily abstracted; and

in a moment Clericus, moving as lightly as a cat, joined him. They stood close together, only a few feet away from where Helen sat, but the light from the house, spreading out before them, drew their eyes away from the shadows, and they remained unaware of her.

"Have you—er—brought it?" asked Clericus, with an effect of delicacy masking avidity.

"Yes; here it is," said Jim grumpily; and he passed a slip of paper to the other.

Clericus opened it and held it to the light.

"Whew!" he whistled softly. "You are g-generous, Mr. H-Hollis!"

"If the thing's real, that isn't enough," grumbled Jim. "Don't know why you should want to give it away."

"Ah, nothing but n-necessity could make me p-part with it at all," murmured Clericus sadly. "It was my s-sainted m-mother's."

Jim shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"I say," he burst out, "if you feel like that I'd rather not take it. Just regard the money as a loan, and keep the thing in the family."

This suggestion visibly disturbed Clericus.

"Oh, no, n-no!" he protested. "I'd r-rather not k-keep it. Really. R-really! I can't af-ford to; and I have no children to p-pass it on to; and my—M-Mrs. Agnew and I—I may tell you in confidence, Mr. H-Hollis, we d-don't see eye to eye in s-some things. It—it would relieve me in several w-ways, Mr. H-Hollis, if you'd t-take it."

"All right," said Jim gruffly. "But I don't feel comfortable about the business, any of it."

"I do, I assure you I d-do!" insisted Clericus earnestly. "It t-takes a load off my mind, it d-does, indeed. Thank you, Mr. H-Hollis. Thank you h-heartily. And now—one more f-favor—may I ask you to say n-nothing to anybody about the t-transaction? You see, M-Mrs. Agnew—Thank you, sir; I knew I could r-rely on you."

There was a short, uncomfortable pause. Then Jim, with a muttered good night, took himself off; and Helen prepared to do likewise as soon as Clericus should move, for she did not fancy the position of eavesdropper.

But Clericus still hovered in the path-

way, as if waiting for some one; and in a moment the scientist emerged from the doorway, and she found herself condemned to continue her unpleasant part of eaves-dropper. Her premonition had been correct; it was, indeed, a night for conspiracies.

The new conspirator came with an odd gait. As he crossed the porch he was obviously in a hurry; when he saw Clericus lying in wait for him, he checked his speed abruptly; but after he glanced sidewise and observed the muscular Terry eying him from the window, he almost ran.

"Come over here!" he muttered, pulling Clericus by the sleeve. "Out o' range o' that window. That guy gives me the jim-jams."

They moved into the shadow, at a little distance from Helen, and Clericus turned with the eager question: "Have you m-made up your m-mind to take it?"

"I s'pose so," answered the scientist in a fretful tone. "She'll have him beat me up if I don't. How much you charging?"

"Same p-price."

"It's too damn' much."

"Now, professor, you know you don't m-mean that. You must be b-blind if you don't see it's a b-bargain. I'm giving it to you for h-half what it's w-worth."

"What you doing that for?" asked the scientist, peevishly and suspiciously.

"What's the string?"

"There's no st-string. I t-told you. It's an heirloom—I-left me by my dear Aunt R-Rebecca—and I p-part with it only under the sp-pur of necessity."

The conversation began to fall on Helen's ear with a familiar ring. She had an impulse to join it by shouting out loudly and suddenly that the Rev. Mr. Agnew and his reverend lady did not always see eye to eye in money matters.

Clericus, however, proceeded to save her the trouble; and, that done, he varied the formula by imparting the information that now, while Mrs. Agnew was in the kitchen, was the best time to go for it. The scientist hesitated; but when, looking over at the lighted window, he saw Tessie holding Terry back and peering out with bright, expectant eyes, he appeared to change his mind.

"All right," he said sullenly, "I'm bound to be stung one way or the other, and I s'pose you'll hurt less than he will."

"Of c-course. But—before we c-close

the d-deal," said Clericus, with an access of diffident firmness, "there's something else. I'd rather have cash than a ch-check, please."

Unexpectedly, the scientist brightened. "Rather have cash? Sure. Surest thing you know. Give it to you in the morning."

"I'd l-like it to-night, if you don't m-mind," said Clericus, shyly determined. Evidently he shared Tessie's impression of the evanescence of Arabs and scientists.

"Well, that's all right with me," answered the professor, with a complete return to geniality. "Give it to you just as soon as I get through with that little graft-er. C'mon."

The two went off toward the cabin, back of the one that housed the clerical pair; and Helen prepared to remove herself before she should become a party to any more secret transactions. She was thoroughly mystified.

She could not escape the idea that her pendant was involved in all these dealings; and certainly it was impossible not to conclude that Clericus was involved, too. Of course it was absurd to suspect poor, simple Clericus of trickery—and yet—these mysteries—that pendant—

Perplexed and distressed, she went slowly back to her cabin; it seemed, with all its drawbacks, the safest place to spend this curious evening. She lighted her lamp, and decided to admit the desperateness of her situation by taking to letter writing.

To that end she went to her little bedroom, pulled her suit case from under the bed, and opened it to take out her writing materials. The fountain pen had slipped out of its groove in the fitted leather case, and escaped somewhere among her city clothes. She explored the corners and pockets of the suit case in search of it.

Suddenly she sat back on her heels with an exclamation. In the bottom of the deepest pocket she had found a little package, wrapped in white tissue paper, whose feeling startled her. She unwrapped it with fingers that fumbled with excitement. And there, flashing and glittering in the feeble light of the bedroom candle, was the diamond pendant.

X

HELEN needed no wheeze of Clericus's battered alarm clock to call her in the morning; she was up and dressed and eager

to face the world long before its crooked hands pointed to breakfast time. The discovery of the pendant had excited her, and at the same time thrown her into worse confusion than ever.

It was manifestly impossible that it could be the same jewel which had dropped into Jim's pocket, coasted through the blonde's kimono, and been bought by the professor in Clericus's cabin—especially if, as she now began to think, it had lain in her suit case all the time.

It was a jocund morning. Yesterday's sulks had lifted from the atmosphere, and left a clear field for the sun, which was making up for lost time. The birds, too, were roused to new enthusiasm, and the pine smell filled the air like clean, delicious incense.

Helen set out for the clubhouse with a mind much more cheerful than yesterday's, although still puzzled. She had taken the precaution to put the pendant into her breast pocket, and it made a bright little *tink-tinking* sound as she scrambled down the path.

In the main avenue she met the omnipresent fat man, bobbing in her direction.

"Mornin', Miss Hope; hope I see you well!" he greeted cheerily. "That's kind of a joke, ain't it? But it's the truth, too."

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Macomber. How do you manage to be in all the places at all the times? Are you trip-lets?"

"Oh, I stir round. Good for the liver, ma'am. I came over now on an errand for Mrs. Agnew; she wants to get everybody to breakfast on time, becuz she's got a big day on, an' says she never gets her dishes done if the folks keep stragglin' in for an hour or so. But I see I don't have to hurry you up none."

He looked at her penetratingly, and it seemed to her that his small bright eyes lighted at once on her pocket, and bored straight through the thin silk to the jewel inside.

"So you've seen Mrs. Agnew! Do you know I've never set eyes on her, though I've been here ten days. What does she look like?"

"Oh, she just bellered at me. I ain't seen her either; she seems a sort of an exclusive lady. There's Mr. Hollis. I called him on my way; he was half dressed, just needed a little urgin'."

Sure enough, Jim was coming down his

path, looking very clean in fresh khaki garments. He was obviously annoyed at meeting them, but he made the best of the unavoidable, and fell in step with them, three abreast.

"Fine day, Mr. Hollis," said the fat man sociably.

"Umph," returned Jim.

"Thought yest'd'y we'd have rain, but it don't look much like it now."

"Umph," returned Jim, this time with a faintly negative grunt.

"You don't sound talkative," observed Helen coldly. "Have you something on your mind?"

Jim looked at her oddly, and his hand moved nervously to his coat pocket. The fat man's keen little eyes followed the gesture; he was as observant as a squirrel.

"Neither on nor in," answered Jim with an obvious effort at mannerliness. "My mind's an aching void. I've got to get two thousand words out of it before night, and I don't know that many."

"Find this a good place to write stories, Mr. Hollis?" inquired Mr. Macomber. "Or is there too much else goin' on?"

Jim gave him a sharp, suspicious glance, but the mild round face was blank of all expression save amiable interest, tintured with ingenuous respect for the creative mind.

"Oh, it's a good enough place," said Jim grudgingly. "Only trouble is with me; my sponsors in baptism wished a boiled turnip on me instead of a brain. Susan, you never get stalled, do you?" He turned to Helen with unconscious wistfulness. "You seem so capable of getting right on to wherever you want to go. Wish I knew how."

Helen met his eyes. The troubled eager gaze of them, and the queer wayward twist of his black crest turned her heart to water.

How could he be so blind as to think she always went where she wanted to go? What would he say if he knew where she wanted to go this minute?

"He wouldn't stop to say anything," she thought bitterly; "he'd run so fast you couldn't see him for dust."

Before she had found an answer they were abreast of Professor Babcock's cabin, from which that earnest seeker for wisdom had just emerged. Standing with his back to them, he locked the door, put the key in his pocket, produced a padlock, and

affixed it with great care; he tried the window, and then went back and tried the door again.

The three wayfarers stood still and gazed at these elaborate precautions.

"Anybody'd think you didn't suppose the folks around here was honest, professor!" remarked the fat man mildly. "You think we want to break in an' eat your specimens?"

The geologist jumped, and turned a flustered face toward them.

"Oh, no—no!" he said hurriedly. "Nothing like that; no, no. Just a scholar's precautions. I have to be careful, Mr. Macomber. My specimens, as the lady said, are my jewels."

Jewels again, thought Helen. Aloud she said maliciously: "I think there are some people here who would bear watching. Mr. Macomber thinks so, too."

Professor Babcock's scholarly face was a comic mask of dismay. "Wh-why do you say that, Miss Hope?" he demanded agitatedly. "You got any reason?"

"No, she ain't got any reason," soothed Mr. Macomber. "Just talkin' for fun, like young ladies like to do. You an' me, professor, we're older; we don't talk unless we got somethin' to say, do we?"

"Even people who don't have anything to say sometimes say a mouthful," murmured Helen, but something in the fat man's glance checked her, and she subsided into silence.

Mr. Macomber had evidently been successful in his rôle of tocsin. Tessie and Terry were already at the table, garbed in their working clothes, which required very little putting on; Mrs. Tipton entered a moment after the personally conducted group, and in another moment was followed by Mrs. Erroll, almost invisible behind a large pink yawn. It was an unprecedented occasion—five minutes past breakfast time, and everybody assembled—and Clericus showed himself amazed and gratified.

"Well, w-well!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "A f-full house! I mean to say, an entire f-family! Well, well! Mrs. Agnew will be ast-tonished!"

"Hey?" returned Mrs. Tipton sharply. "I understand it was Mrs. Agnew who especially requested it."

"Gosh, shoda I!" yawned Mrs. Erroll. "Thaw we hadda come now or missa fee'-bag n'tirely. He tol' me."

"Told me, too," grumbled Tessie. "I stopped right in the middle of a figure, with my toe hung on Terry's ear."

Even in the midst of their annoyance the widow coalition exchanged a glance of shuddering disgust.

"So I did," said Mr. Macomber, nodding placidly and glancing around the seated group with his bright little eyes. "I wanted to get you all together an' tell you a bedtime story. I been kind o' preparin' this little story ever since I got here, an' now it's in pretty good shape. It's a detective story. I'm the detective."

He leaned back in his chair, and as he did so—seemingly of its own volition—the front of his coat twitched back and disclosed the glittering symbol of his office reposing on his convex waistcoat. Every one started visibly, and one or two were galvanized into quick motion.

"Keep your seat, professor," said the fat man pleasantly. "Mr. Agnew, you stay right here, please. I want everybody to hear my story; it's real interestin'."

"Of course, of c-course," said Clericus, from the kitchen door. "I w-want to hear it. Just going for the c-cereal."

"That's all right, go ahead," answered the detective. "Nobody'll leave the house till it's done, anyway; the police are posted outside."

This mild announcement completed the havoc wrought by his first disclosure. The professor slumped limply into his chair; Mrs. Erroll dropped her jaw in open consternation; Mrs. Tipton pinched together a pair of thin lips gone suddenly pale; Tessie and Terry clutched each other's hands.

Every one stared with wide, hypnotized eyes at the little fat man. Formerly the least of these, it now had become with him as with the king; wherever he sat was the head of the table.

The round eyes centered upon him seemed to give him an idea, and he smiled beamingly.

"I tell you what," he said, "let's have a lil game. 'Stead o' me tellin' this story to you, you-all take turns tellin' me. Each one tell till you get to an excitin' place, an' then leave it to the next one. That's a nice game; used to play it when I was a kid."

His keen glance traveled from face to face, resting a moment on each one. Apparently his sole intention was to pick out

an appropriate beginner for his harmless pastime. But so hypnotic was the effect of his bright eyes and his bright badge that several began at once, regardless of turn.

"There's nothing criminal about it!" said Mrs. Tipton defiantly. "The money was mine by rights. If my mean old husband goes and wills my own money away from me, haven't I got a right to get it back again? I only doctored a word or two. There was nothing to make such a fuss about; it would all have blown over in a little while. What did you come nosing around for?"

"You little fat lobster!" cried the blonde, bursting into angry tears. "Whatcha pickin' on me for? Am I the first dame that ever got hitched up to two guys? Gosh, in the Bible they used to have a hundred! Just as soon as Eddie got his decree I wouldn't 'a' had but one anyhow, an' I wasn't goin' to do it again till I got rid o' Fred. Everything was goin' fine till you had to stick your beezee in!"

"You think," the professor was saying coldly, "you got something on me because you happened to hear about that little unpleasantness in Rochester. But I tell you, that was perfectly good money. Lots of money goes into collection plates every Sunday that ain't as good as that. And if you mean that business in Syracuse—well, you just prove it. That's all I say; just prove it!"

Unheeding the disclosures of the others, Tessie thrust her bright head forward over the table.

"It ain't so!" she shouted. "We're hitched just as regular as anybody; Father Clancy done it. But we had to keep it dark; any manager'd rather have the mumps than a pair o' married dancin' pardners!"

Helen, who had taken in small parts of all these juicy items, gasped with amazement; but so potent was the little man's twinkling gaze that she found herself searching her own past for guilty secrets. If he had looked at her an instant longer she felt she would have had to confess mayhem, murder and arson.

"That's very interestin'," encouraged Mr. Macomber, like a kindly host. "You tell your stories very nice; an' you saved me quite a little trouble, too, becuz I didn't know about any o' you except Mr. Steve Hanson, alias Babcock. That's the ad-

vantage o' round games. An' now—who's got any di'monds?"

There was a ripple of motion around the table, produced by several people giving a simultaneous start.

"All right," said the fat man. "I know all about 'em, so you needn't try to keep anything dark. Flash 'em up, sisters and brothers!"

Helen dipped into her pocket and drew out the pendant, which dangled from its chain, blazing in the morning light like a miniature sun; at the same minute the blonde produced from somewhere within her billowing raiment a sparkling brooch; Mrs. Tipton, from her ladylike black hand bag, a pair of earrings; Tessie, from a flap on the breast of her brief garment, a glittering watch, and Jim, from that suspected coat pocket, a solitaire ring.

Everybody stared at the yield of everybody else. The bare board was transformed into a jeweler's counter.

"So," remarked Mr. Macomber. "Quite a collection. I s'pose he made you promise to keep mum as long as you stayed?" He looked inquiringly at Helen.

"Yes," nodded she. "He explained that his pendant was an heirloom that he couldn't afford to keep, but his wife didn't want him to sell it. I wonder," added Helen, looking around the glittering table, "if these are all heirlooms?"

"I expect likely," said Mr. Macomber. "Soapy Sam's the best diamond thief in the U. S. A., an' I s'pose he's related to the whole human race; he's got quite a family to draw heirlooms from."

"Soapy Sam!" repeated Helen faintly. "But I bought this from Mr. Agnew—and he's a retired clergyman!"

The fat man chuckled.

"Guess that's right; retired so far the Board o' Missions won't never see any more of him," he commented. "Sam's always been slick, but this minister lay beats any he ever had. Them dark glasses, an' his collar hindside before, an' that ladylike stutter—gosh, he certainly did act refined! Now how did you folks pay him for this swag—checks?"

Distracted from their amazement by the question, they all nodded gloomily. All except Mrs. Terry. She had been plunged in woe on learning that she had given away the guilty secret of her respectability for nothing, but now she brightened enough to giggle.

"I didn't pay for mine at all," she announced. "That guy did. He may be a crooked guy, but he's a good straight spender, when you nail him to the mast."

Mr. Babcock, alias Hanson, emitted a sardonic chuckle.

"I won't kick any about the cost o' that little trinket," he said, "because he made me pay cash for it, and—tee-hee!—I paid him with stage money. That's one time the joke wasn't on me."

Helen looked across the table to see the object of this quaint transaction, and exclaimed:

"Why, that's my watch!"

The genial detective smiled. He reached over to Tessie's place, picked up the trinket, and passed it over to Helen.

"That's easy," he said. "Now, the rest o' you give me your loot, an' I'll get it back to the owners. That there pendant belongs to the well-known Mrs. Endicott Vanderpool, an' she's been puttin' up a holler an' a half about it. You won't have any trouble stoppin' payment on your checks; he hasn't had time to get 'em cashed, an' if he has we'll get it back off him. All right, now we'll proceed to the next chapter."

He pocketed the glittering handful, and raising his voice, called out: "Sam! Come in here!"

There was complete silence in the kitchen, and after a moment he called again. Then, with a look of faint uneasiness, he arose, glanced out of the window—where the police reinforcements were now plainly visible to every one, posted at the exits and in the main path—and hurried to the kitchen to investigate. Stopping on the threshold, he peered in cautiously.

There was a brief pause. Then the detective exclaimed, in a voice of complete amazement that brought all the tense company at the table to their feet:

"Well, dog my cats!"

"What is it?" cried everybody.

"Look at that!" said Mr. Macomber, pointing dramatically.

Everybody looked, peering through the narrow doorway above and around his pudgy person, and everybody gave a simultaneous exclamation. There in the kitchen, in a chair beside the stove, were the unmistakable clerical garments of their erstwhile host, oddly and inappropriately draped, or rather flung, on a lady with bobbed blond hair.

She looked up sulkily at the chorus of exclamers, and it was to be seen that she had a rather pretty face, and a pair of crafty eyes of an unusual yellowish brown.

"Cat-eye Lulu!" exclaimed Mr. Macomber, completely astounded. "What are you doin' here?"

"Stickin' by Sam, o' course," grunted Mrs. Clericus, for it was indeed she.

"Well, dog my cats! I never knew you an' him had hooked up. An' where's Sam?"

Cat-eye Lulu smiled craftily.

"Don't you wish you knew?" she retorted.

"I'm goin' to know, Lulu. You know blame well you can't put anything over on me. Is he in the cupboard?"

"Look an' see."

The fat man looked, rapidly, in the meager closet that barely could house the pots and pans, and then behind the door, behind the stove, and in the dark corner under the table. This exhausted the possible resources of the room, which was small and bare.

"Come on, now," said Mr. Macomber severely. "Where is he? Spill it, Lulu."

"Maybe he went back in the dinin' room."

"Maybe he didn't. I been there all the time. An' he couldn't 'a' gone outside, becuz I got a man at every door an' window. He—what you laughin' at, Lulu?"

"Find out for yourself," said Lulu with a sardonic grin. "Smart guy like you."

"You bet I will." The fat man strode across the room with the longest steps his short plump legs could compass, and flung open the back door.

"Hey!" he said to a rural policeman on guard. "Anybody come out this way?"

"No, sir. Nobody but an old lady that don't belong to the camp."

"What! What old lady? What like?"

"Why, a real nice old lady, with a sun-bonnet. She just comes here for extra help; she lives in that farmhouse over—"

"You knock-kneed, squint-eyed son of a squab!" the usually calm Mr. Macomber exclaimed, in language thus edited for polite publication. "Didn't I tell you not to let anybody out?"

"You said not to let any men; 'specially not the minister guy with the specs," said the kindly rustic. "You never said nothin' about no old ladies. This was a reel nice—"

"You!" ejaculated the fat man, adding more language to fit the situation. "You've done it now! You get after him and bring him back or I'll have you broke!"

"He, he!" giggled Cat-eye Lulu, standing up, in her incongruous clerical garb, to gloat over the discomfiture of her enemy. "That's one in the eye for you! He's made his get-away. You ain't quite so smart as you thought you were, Mr. Wise Guy!"

"Hey, you!" the fat man shouted to a motor cycle officer. "You go, too. Take your motor bike—telephone all the towns in the county to stop any old woman drivin' a car, alone."

He turned back to the room, his round face red with anger and chagrin.

"How come you let Sam make a get-away like that, an' leave you flat?" he morosely inquired of the lady.

"'Cause you had somethin' on him, an' nothin' on me. I just got out o' choke before we come up here," explained the Rev. Mrs. Agnew, hitching up her trousers, "an' I haven't laid my hooks on a thing this summer—except that pendant, an' then he made me take the damn thing back again."

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen. "That explains it!"

"You bet it does. I dunno what struck Sam to get so damn moral," commented the lady plaintively. "Plumb foolish, I call it. He might 'a' had the cash an' the sparklers, too, an' realized a little somethin' on 'em again. Every little bit helps in these hard times."

"You thank your lucky stars you did take it back," admonished the detective. "You can't afford any monkeyshines, Lulu. Look at me; you never saw me before, neither did Sam—that's why they put me on this job—but your last photographer done so well by you that I knew you at a glance. One pendant 'd land you in the pen, an' no questions asked, either. You gotta watch your step, Lulu."

"Oh, you get to hell outa here," retorted Mrs. Clericus in her womanly way. "You talk too damn much."

"I guess I do," said the fat man ruefully. "If I'd talked less and moved sooner, Soapy wouldn't 'a' made that get-away. Well, I'll move now, anyhow."

He went back to the main room and called through the door: "You guys out there—Clarkson, Jones! Come in here.

Take this gent, the popular counterfeiter, an' put the bracelets on him. Us boys are gonna take you down to the city, Steve, an' show you a big time. Watch the door, Peters. You two ladies, I'd like a little chat with you, please. You young folks, Mr. and Mrs. Terry, Miss Hope an' Mr. Hollis, you can shove off. So long, kids."

Dazed and blinking, Helen went silently out of the cabin and down the steps. The march of events had left her bewildered; strangely bereft, too; for, to be suddenly informed, before breakfast, that the majority of your daily associates are felons, is to have the solid earth knocked out from under you.

There was a step behind her, but she did not turn. It was possibly Tessie, coming to confide the news that she had murdered her aged grandmother, and Helen felt that she could bear no more.

"Susan!" called a voice, deep and vibrant, eager yet deprecating.

She stopped. That voice was something to pin to—yet even about it there was a strangeness now.

"Hello, Jim!" she said over her shoulder. "Where are Tessie and Terry?"

"They stayed to hear the two old girls—what's the word they use in the papers?—grilled."

He caught up with her, and they fell into step together.

"Isn't it petrifying! I suppose I ought to be thrilled, but all I feel is a little sick."

"So do I. I'm glad poor old Clericus got away. Though I suppose that's compounding a felony."

"I suppose we were doing that anyway, buying stolen goods. Jim—did you have any suspicion?"

"Not a ghost. Why should I?"

"You looked so—so furtive that day I came upon you talking with him, and you seemed so embarrassed to have me see you."

"Oh, Susan!" Jim stopped short in the path and looked at her. "Didn't you see what it was I bought?"

"I saw it to-day. A ring." Helen stopped too, and faced him.

"Well—and can't you guess why I looked like a criminal when you caught me at it?"

"Oh! Did you—you didn't—mean it for—"

"Of course I did! And I realized that

you'd be furious if you knew I'd had the nerve to do it. But when he showed it to me, I couldn't help thinking how it would look on your hand—your lovely, slim little hand—and I couldn't help buying it. Of course I knew a ring like that was good for only one purpose. I meant to keep it secret for a long, long time— That's why I've dodged you ever since."

"Jim—why, Jim! I never guessed—never imagined. *Oh!*"

"What's the matter, Susan? You're furious at me?"

"No—I just realized—it's gone—the ring!"

Jim whirled to face her.

"Susan!" he cried. "You don't mean

—you can't mean—you'd take it if it were here!"

She nodded at him, shining-eyed.

"Would I?" she said softly.

The khaki shirt suddenly infolded her in a muscular embrace that shut off all further conversation.

"You darling!" Jim declared huskily.

"You sweetest, loveliest, adorablest thing in the world! Will you wait right here, in this identical spot, while I go to town and get another?"

"No," said Helen, emerging a good deal out of breath. "I'm going with you, Jim. I'm not strong enough for this simple life; I've got to get back to New York for a little peace and quiet."

THE END

GENNESARET

THE sun is down and the night is creeping

Over the plains of Galilee;

Blue fold on fold the hills are sleeping

Above the shadowy, quiet sea.

Through the gray dusk faint boat lights glimmer

Out on the deep where the fishermen go;

In the darkling sky the soft stars shimmer

Like silvern lanterns hanging low.

Lost from the fold, a lone sheep wanders

Down on the desolate, rocky shore;

The sigh of the wind in the oleanders

Blends with the splash of a dipping oar.

Leveled to dust is the ancient city

That Herod built in his day of power;

The palm trees droop as if in pity

O'er the sculptured ruins of wall and tower:

But the stars are still in their ancient places,

And the slumbering mountains still enfold

The vales and the brooding desert spaces

And dark Gennesaret as of old.

And He who walked these waves unfearing

Once on a night of Stygian shade

Lives to-day. His voice still cheering:

"It is I—be not afraid."

He lives! The sighing winds and waters

Seem not mere wind and wave to me,

But a breeze-blown robe that faintly flutters,

And a Voice that stills the troubled sea.

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

The Misery Medicine

TELLING HOW THE BIG FOUR OF TICKFALL TRIED THEIR
SKILL AS MEDICATORS AND AS MEDIATORS, WITH
MORE OR LESS MIXED RESULTS

By E. K. Means

THE Big Four of Tickfall sat under a chinaberry tree in the rear of the Henscratch soft drink emporium. Years before, when the two-room frame building had been a popular and prosperous saloon, there was a high fence around the spot where these men sat, and there the colored patrons used to assemble to play craps. Sitting upon the ground, they wore little spots bare and smooth by the clawing of their fingers to pick up the dice, and hence the "Henscratch."

Now the place was highly respectable but lamentably poor, the fence was torn down, and four disconsolate men sat looking out upon a dusty street, smoking, talking, grumbling, disgusted with the dust, the heat, the somnolence of the village, and the indolence of their own lives.

A white boy named Org Gaitskill came sauntering by, carrying a sick kitten. The four men sat up, for they understood the art of making an event by dramatizing the most insignificant incident. It is thus that the villager gets enough "punch" out of his monotonous existence to convince himself that he is still alive.

"Whar you git dat pussy cat, Org?" Skeeter Butts asked eagerly.

"Found him in the alley," Org told him.

"Whut ails dat cat?" Vinegar Atts inquired.

"Sick."

"He shore do look like he's on his way to a early grave," Pap Curtain, the gravedigger, announced.

"Tain't doin' him no good to be shuck up by havin' you tote him around," Figger Bush remarked.

"I'm going to keep him with me till he dies, and then I'll have a big funeral," Org explained, as he set the cat upon the ground

in their midst. "He might sneak off and die where I can't find him."

The four men inspected the suffering feline, and the anguish of the animal stirred a little pity in the heart of Skeeter Butts. He called to Little Bit, who was in charge of the soft drink stand, and Little Bit brought out a small bottle of milk, a saucer, and a bottle which bore the warning of a skull and crossbones upon the label.

Skeeter poured some milk into the saucer, added a few drops from the contents of the bottle of medicine, and offered it to the kitten. The little animal lapped it up unsuspectingly, and the men watched with the tense attitude of those bidding a living thing farewell from this terrestrial sphere. Little Bit and Org, the two children, did not know that the kitten was drinking poison.

When the little animal refused to take more of the milk, Skeeter said:

"Now, Org, you go ramblin' away from here wid dat cat. He's feelin' better already, an' 'twon't be long befo' he will be put complete out of his misery."

Org picked up the kitten and sauntered idly away. Little Bit picked up the saucer and the medicine bottle, and took them back where he had found them. The four men lighted up their pipes.

"Ain't you know it's bad luck to kill a cat?" Vinegar remarked to Skeeter.

"Suttinly," Skeeter answered. "I wouldn't kill a cat fer a millyum dollars; but in dis case I jes' gives de cat a little poison. I ain't kilt him. He's livin' till yit, an' is done gone away from here. De poison will kill him—dat's diffunt."

"Dat's a new kind of argiment—pretty good, too," Vinegar grunted.

"Shore! Somebody had to put dat cat

out'n his misery," Skeeter continued. "Excusin' dat, I made dat little white boy happy, an' he'll pull off a scrumptious funeral an' make a whole lot of his little white friends happy. De cat will go up to heaven an' be a catamount, so a good time will be had by all."

Then the incident was forgotten, because a negro man came down the street and stopped where they were sitting.

"How you feelin', Licky?" Skeeter greeted him.

"Tol'able."

"Take a chair an' set down an' rest yo' foots. Whut you mean by sayin' dat you feels tol'able?"

"Well, I kin set up an' eat three meals a day, ef I kin git 'em; but I ain't feelin' strong enough to wuck," Licky explained.

"Dat's been my nachel-bawn feelin' ever since I wus nachel-bawn," Vinegar Atts announced, with high approval of the diagnosis. "Whut's done fotch you aroun' dese parts, feelin' porely like you do?"

"Trouble," Licky said briefly. "I'm in love wid a cullud nigger gal."

"Won't she marry you?" Skeeter inquired.

"Yep—she promised to do dat dis mawnin'," Licky said.

"An' you done regretted dat you axed her," Figger Bush broke in. "I onderstands dat. It happens frequencely. Mebbe you ain't in so deep you cain't git out. Does you crave out?"

"Naw!" Licky protested vehemently. "I'm glad she promised. Dat gal is a angel!"

"I ain't never heard tell of no nigger angels," Vinegar Atts, the preacher, remarked meditatively. "Of co'se, dar is holy angels an' onholy angels whut has fallen from deir high estate. Mebbe yo' gal angel done fell."

"Naw, she ain't fell," Licky declared. "De trouble is dat Pap Toon done tuck a fall out of me. Dat ole paw got mad an' fired me out."

"Ho!" Skeeter barked. "You ain't got no home an' no job an' no money—jes' de desire to git married an' settle down?"

"Yes, suh, dat whar de trouble comes in at," Licky agreed. "You see, my paw owns a little farm an' a little store, an' I overseed de farm an' managed de store, an' I craves to continue so. I got kinder keerless, an' paw got kinder mad, an' us had a few words an' parted."

"All you got to do is to wait," Vinegar Atts declared.

"Wait fer paw to git over his mad?" Licky asked.

"Naw—wait fer dat gal to find out whut shape you is in to suppote her accawdin' to de way she wus raised up an' used to," Vinegar explained in an impatient tone. "When she knows dat you is shawt on money, an' dat yo' paw has dismissed you from yo' happy home an' amputated you from yo' reg'lar job, you will find dat somepin gits de matter wid de works an' yo' love wagon don't go so good."

Licky heard this with signs of distress. He realized the truth, and meditated upon it with the growing assurance that Vinegar had correctly outlined the course of future events. Then he brightened up and said hopefully:

"I remember now whut I come to see you fellers about. Cain't you go an' see pap an' pussuade him to take me back, because I is fixin' to marry an' craves to be a big success in life fer my wife's sake?"

"Shore!" Vinegar said heartily. "We don't mind gwine. Dat ole pap of yourn is a fancy cusser. When he gits cussin' easy, he don't repeat a single word. I expeck, when he explavicates about you, he'll think up some new words dat ain't never been spoke befo'!"

II

THE four men arose and walked slowly down to a section of the town which lay upon the banks of Cooley Bayou and bore the name of Shiny. They stopped in front of a dilapidated one-room building, and decided that the man they sought would probably be in his store.

Entering, they found him sitting upon a low chair, with his knees astride of a barrel, which he was using as a writing table. He was so intent upon the task before him that he did not notice the entrance of the men until they were almost upon him.

"Hello, niggers!" he greeted them, laying down his pencil with an air of great relief. "I'm shore glad you come in to rest my mind!"

"Whut you doin'?" Vinegar asked.

"Writin' a advertize fer my store," the old man said wearily. "It's shore hard wuck! I bet I done sweat dis barrel full of sweat to-day."

"How you gittin' along?" Figger Bush asked.

"Mebbe you-all could he'p me," the old man suggested hopefully.

"Read whut you done writ, Brudder Toon," Skeeter said eagerly. "I'm in de same bizness wid you, an' has a heap of good idears."

"I won't read it, I'll pass it aroun'," Toon replied modestly.

So each inspected a paper which bore these words:

I will say this to the passing trade—
Cold drinks on ice here in the shade,
And prices to suit for the colored water—
One bottle for five, or six for a quarter.
Just sidetrack here at Rock Bottom Store,
You will then be ready for a pleasant ride;
O'er the new gravel road you can softly glide.
Accommodations in town are some better than
here,

But you know we live in a different sphere.
With the above remarks I will say no more,
But for cold drinks sidetrack at Rock Bottom
Store.

If I have said too much, you will please excuse,
But if you want cold drinks I will not refuse.

"Dat reads kinder wabbly an' loose jointed to me," Skeeter Butts remarked critically. "Whut ails it?"

"I dunno," Toon told him.

"It 'pears to me you ain't used to writin' dese here advertizes," remarked Skeeter, who had not forgotten the object of their visit. "I'm seed you git out better ones dan dis is."

"Licky wucked dem out fer me," Toon said sadly; "but Licky ain't here no mo'. He acted aroun' here like he didn't gib a durn, so I chased him off."

"Mebbe Licky was in love an' warn't responsible," Vinegar remarked. "A nigger wid a gal on his mind cain't hold no two idears."

"Dat's right," Figger Bush corroborated. "I been noticin' dat Licky's mind warn't right fer some time. He ain't no real loon'tick, because he ain't got dat far along, but he ain't got his good senses."

"Ef he's crippled under his hat, you hadn't oughter run him off," Pap Curtain remarked, following the lead of the others. "He mought hurt hisself."

"Licky's like a mule," Toon said. "You never heard of a mule hurtin' hisself."

"I'm heard tell of a mule hurtin' somebody else," Figger Bush quacked. "One time a mule done me powerful bad, when—"

"I figger dat Licky is dangerous," Vinegar Atts interrupted, glaring at the irrelevant Figger Bush.

"Me, too," Skeeter Butts declared. "In fack, ef you don't take him back in de store an' keep yo' eye upon him, we'll have to repote him to de sheriff, an' Marse John will take him away to be a loon'tick."

"I don't want nothin' like dat," Toon said pleadingly. "I don't think he's dat bad off."

"Mebbe not," admitted Vinegar. "It mought be he's only crazy about a gal."

"Yep, dat's it," Figger Bush broke in. "He tole me jes' dis mawnin' dat he wus cravin' to git married."

"I don't mind havin' Licky come back here ef his mind ain't right," Toon said. "He's my child, an' even ef his brains is addled, he kin wait on de store and write dese here jingle verses about our goods."

"Mebbe dem jingle verses cracked his bean," Vinegar suggested. "I'm had a funny feelin' in my head ever since I read dat paper you handed me."

"All of us is kinder crazy," Pap Curtain remarked. "Some is wuss dan yuthers. De real bad loon'ticks is tuck away, so dey won't pester de yuther loon'ticks an' make 'em wuss dan dey is; but I think ef Toon takes his boy back, an' treats him gentle, an' pays him a little money, mebbe Licky kin wuck his mind aroun' straight agin."

"All right," Toon agreed eagerly. "I wouldn't hab no harm happen to dat boy. Ef you-all sees him, tell him to come home."

"How about dat gal he craves to marry?" Vinegar Atts inquired.

"Whut's her name?" Toon asked.

The four men looked at one another in consternation. They had forgotten to ask Licky.

"I dunno," Vinegar confessed. "I fer-got to ax whut her present name is. You see, when she gits married, she'll change it. I think eve'y woman ought to be knowed by a number ontill she wedlocks off to some man. Den we wouldn't hab to load down our minds wid names dat won't do us no good atter dey's married."

"Whar do she live?" Toon asked.

Once more the four men looked at one another, and were conscious of their inadequate preparation for their mission. Skeeter Butts tried to answer that.

"She don't live nowhar. Mebbe she stays at some place, but a female woman don't really live at some place ontill she gits some place to live at, an' dat is wherever

her husbunt fixes up when he gits ready to fotch her home. I imagines she's jes' kinder hangin' aroun' in dese parts, waitin' to be tuck to some place."

"Whar do she wuck at, an' whut do she do fer a livin'?" Toon inquired next.

For the third time the quartet did some heavy thinking under desperate circumstances. Finally Pap Curtain replied:

"Us don't really know much about de gal, Toon. You see, we figger dat Licky's a little crazy in his mind, an' 'tain't safe to ax dat kind too much about deir own bizness. I've knowed 'em to fly off de handle like a ole ax an' chop off yo' big toe. Me, I feels dis way—ef a nigger is any crazier dan I am, I don't want to hab nothin' to do wid him."

"Amen!" Vinegar Atts responded unctuously. "Now, all dese little matters bein' finally settled up, we will go back an' repote to Licky dat you fergives him complete fer not carin' a durn, dat you invites him cordial to come back to de store, an' dat he kin fotch any female wid him dat he's willin' to promise to love, honor, an' obey till death do 'em part."

"Naw!" old Toon exploded. "I ain't gwine hab no gal, name unknowed, from somewhar, nobody knows whar at, wuckin' at some job dat ain't no visible means of suppute. I ain't havin' no kind of gal of dat kind married to de kind of boy my boy is, fiddle in his mind an' all!"

"Mebbe she writes advertizes," Figger Bush suggested. Then he parodied: "Ef I'm said too much, you will please excuse; but ef she wants to marry Licky, I'll not refuse."

"Naw!" Toon howled. "Tell him ef he fetches a woman to dis cabin I'll have him put in a loon'tick house fer life! Any man is crazy dat gits married—it's a shore sign. I been married four times, an' I knows!"

III

LICKY came to the Henscratch that afternoon, and the four men made their report.

"Yo' paw mus' shore be missin' you, Licky," Vinegar told him. "He disappointed me complete. I went along wid de crowd to hear de ole man cuss, an' he didn't say a single bad word."

"Pap mus' hab refawmed recent," Licky said. "He wus awful bitter spoken to me."

"De ole man said you could come back," Skeeter assured the prodigal son. "I think we presented de case real politic. Us did not argify—we mashed down heavy on de ole man's love of his onliest boy, an' specified dat you needed his special care an' protection."

"Dat wus fine!" Licky applauded. "Dat ole feller gits mean notions in his head, but he don't cherish spite. I'm shore glad dat you fixed it up fer me."

"But de ole man sot his foot down on one thing," Pap Curtain told him. "He said he wusn't openin' his house an' heart to no woman. You kin go back dar alone, but ef you wants to take a wife wid you, positively not."

"Huh!" Licky grunted in a disappointed voice. "I might 'a' knowed you four ole blunderbusses would shoot off an' mess up de scenery. Now you done gone an' done it. De onliest reason I axed you to go see pap wus to fix his mind on dat woman, an' now you done fixed his mind off dat woman."

"We didn't hab no chance to do no yutherwise," Figger Bush quacked. "How could we talk persuasive about a gal when we ain't know her name, ain't know whar she lives at, an' ain't know whut she wucks at when she wucks? You ain't gib us no talkin' points at all. Lawd, we had a awful time! Some of us mighty nigh had to tell a lie."

"You done got me in a awful mess, an' dat ain't no lie," Licky mourned. "Whut you reckon I went an' done while you-all wus gone?"

"Somepin foolish!" Skeeter snapped.

"I got married," Licky informed them.

"Married!" Skeeter squealed.

"Yes, suh—done it jes' befo' dinner time, an' got my weddin' meal at de Shinsbone Resteraw."

"How come I didn't git dat weddin' fee?" Vinegar Atts bawled angrily. "Here you send me down on Cooley Bayou on a wild-geese chase to make a peace wid yo' paw, an' I don't even git de honor of wedlockin' you!"

"I didn't hab no money to pay you," Licky said simply. "Excusin' dat my new wife wucked fer de Revun Dr. Sentelle, an' dat white man married us an' didn't charge me nothin' an' gimme five dollars."

"Well, dat's diffunt," Vinegar admitted. "I'm puffedly willin' fer de Revun Sentelle to do all my charity practice."

"Hold on, fellers!" Figger Bush barked. "Le's see kin we git dis straight. Is you really married?"

"Yep," Licky said.

"Did you marry de same gal you wus tellin' us about dis mawnin'?" Figger demanded.

"Suttinly. Whut you mean by axin' words like dat?"

"Well, I dunno," Figger reflected. "Niggers, dey's notional. I'm knowed a coon to put his money on a little black filly, an' start off wid a whoop an' a bang, an' change his bet to a sorrel mare befo' dey made de home stretch. I done it myself; but in yo' case I 'pologizes. I'm shore you done whut you done fer de best."

"But is you pondered about whut yo' paw's gwine to say?" Pap Curtain asked. "When we left him, he didn't look like he aimed to throw rice. When he sees you now he'll reach fer a brick."

"I'm got dat all planned out," Licky grinned. "I expects you four men to go to paw an' break de news to him."

"Don't fotch me in no mattermony mess," Skeeter snapped. "I'm willin' to help up to de time when two onwise an' diluted fools gits hitched, but not after dat time. I used to be young an' foolish, but my legs is gittin' old an' stiff, an' I cultivates discretion now, because I cain't run fast no more. I encourages 'em to jump into de bramble bush, but I ain't pullin' 'em out. I have done it an' got scratched."

"I motions dat we go back an' wind up dis bizness," Vinegar Atts proposed. "Dese young folks ain't axin' us to do nothin' but bust de news. Mebbe I'll git to hear de old man cuss yit! We kin esplain to him dat we didn't hab nothin' to do wid it, an' he cain't blame us. Ef Skeeter don't want in on it, he kin escuse hisself out."

"I'll go 'long wid de boys," Skeeter agreed, reluctantly; "but I'm tellin' you, us niggers will be huntin' somewhar fer to git befo' dis day is over."

"Dat's fine an' noble," Licky said happily. "Me an' my wife will foller you an' hide behin' de store ontill de ole man's will-in' to welcome us home."

"Whar is dis here wife of yourn now?" Vinegar asked.

"She's settin' in de Henscratch, drinkin' pop out'n a bottle."

All the men knew the girl, so they walked together to the Rock Bottom Store, and then the newly-weds slipped away to

hide until the signal was given to appear and receive the paternal blessing.

The Rock Bottom Store was one of those groceries which cater to customers who are very poor. There one could buy five cents' worth of butter, three cents' worth of flour, a nickel's worth of bacon, two potatoes and one onion, and make a meal. The colored patrons had no ice boxes in which to preserve food and no place to store groceries, so they lived from hand to mouth.

A man running all day to wait on customers who bought two cents' worth of sugar and three cents' worth of lard would run himself to death and take in very little money to pay his funeral expenses. For his own convenience, therefore, old Toon had inaugurated the first "cash and carry" store in the world. This is the way he worked it:

He sat in a rocking-chair in the middle of the doorway, so that his customers could pass on either side of him. He spent his time chewing tobacco and broadcasting upon the sidewalk in front of his place of business. When a customer appeared, this was the conversation:

"Whut you want?"

"Two cents' wuth pertaters."

"Gimme de money!" Expecterating, Toon trousered the pennies and added: "Go to de pertater sack an' git three little ones. Bring 'em here an' lemme see 'em."

Business was slack when the Big Four arrived, and Toon was sitting in his chair, asleep. Hearing their footsteps, he aroused and asked sleepily:

"Whut you want?"

"Wake up, Toon!" Vinegar Atts said in a hearty tone. "We come to bust some news in yo' face. Yo' boy Licky is married to de finest nigger gal in Tickfall."

"Naw!" Toon whooped.

"Yep!" Vinegar whooped back. "So now dar ain't nothin' to do but to fergive an' fergit an' kill de fatted prodigal an' say congratulations."

"Dat ain't so bad, Toon," Skeeter put in. "Dat gal will come in handy waitin' on de customers. You needs somebody to tie up yo' little two-cent bags of sugar."

"Furthermo', you mus' remember dat Licky's afflicted in his head," Pap whispered. "Ef you crosses him, he mought slice you up wid a cheese knife."

"All right! All right!" Toon said, in complete capitulation. "But I'm shore

sorry I'm got a idjut in de fambly. He mus' hab been bawnd dat way. No limb ain't fell on him dat I knows of."

Vinegar walked to the side of the store and gesticulated joyfully.

"Come on, you niggers!" he whooped. "Ole Toon is a happy father-in-law, an' he's waitin' to kiss de bride!"

IV

"Us done a kindly deed," Vinegar remarked with satisfaction, as the four sat around a table in the Henscratch and sipped cool drinks at Skeeter's expense.

"Dar wusn't no money in it," Skeeter lamented. "Dar never is in no kindly deed."

"Yo' reeward will be in heavun," Pap Curtain suggested sardonically. "De Lawd is done wrote down dis day's wuck in His book of rememberunce."

Then the door was thrust open violently and Licky ran in, panting for breath.

"Bad luck, niggers!" he gasped. "Paw an' my new wife is comin' down here to start somepin!"

"How come?" Skeeter asked fearfully.

"You niggers tole paw dat I was a crazy loon'tick, an' crippled under my hat wid a fibble mind, an' dangersome to de community—an' good gawsh! My new wife, she don't like dat kind of talk. She's comin' down here to argify, an' paw's comin' to cuss!"

"I ain't never winned no argimint wid no woman yit," Skeeter announced, as he rose to his feet and reached for his hat. "I don't stay to blimblam no more. My legs is stiff, but I kin limber 'em up."

"Ef you's gwine somewhar," Vinegar remarked, as he pulled his stovepipe hat down on his head, "remember I'm a fat man, an' dey always puts a fatty at de head of de peerade to lead it."

"I'm leavin' out," Skeeter said. "My little flivver is gwine make a lot of dust."

"You better dust pretty quick!" Licky warned them. "I see 'em comin' down de road now. Of co'se, I don't bear nobody no grudge, because I knows my mind ain't so awful profound."

"Shut up! We's done wid you," Pap Curtain snapped. "You's mo' trouble dan a lot of fleas on a dawg. You's kept us scratchin' all day—an' it's a durn hot day, too!"

"Hey, Little Bit!" Skeeter howled, as the four men moved toward the door.

"You stay in charge of dis Henscratch till I comes back. Ef two mad niggers comes in here axin' whar I is, you tell 'em whar I ain't, an' treat 'em to a glass of milk. Mebbe it 'll put 'em out of deir misery."

"Yes, suh," Little Bit squeaked.

A moment later the machine roared its departure from Tickfall, and the Big Four were fleeing from the wrath to come.

The refugees spent the night at the Gaitskill hog camp in the Little Moccasin Swamp. They returned after noon the next day, to find a frightened Little Bit sitting in the Henscratch, his lips trembling, his eyes protruding till they showed much of the white, his hands shaky and uncertain in their movements.

"Whut ails you, sonny?" Vinegar demanded. "You look like you been shocked by some kind of stroke."

"I is," Little Bit answered.

"Is ole Toon an' de newly-weds fergive us?" Skeeter asked.

"Dey is," Little Bit said with a shudder. "Dey done fergive eve'ybody."

"Whut come to pass?" Pap inquired.

"Dey come in here cussin' an' blimblamin' an' bawlin' eve'ybody out, an' I axed 'em to hab a little cold drink of milk, like Skeeter tole me to do. I poured some of de med'cine out'n dat bottle into de drinks, like Skeeter done—"

"My Gawd!" Skeeter shrieked. "Dat wus poison!"

"Dat's whut Doc Moseley said," Little Bit replied.

"Is dey dead?" Vinegar asked in terrified tones.

"Doc Moseley saved 'em, but he had to wuck all night," Little Bit answered. "Dey thought dey wus dyin', an' dey tole me to tell you dat dey fergives you."

"Didn't you know dat medicine wus poison?" Skeeter howled.

"Naw!"

"Didn't you see me gib it to a cat?" Skeeter asked.

"Yep, but I figgered you wus doctorin' de cat to make him well," Little Bit replied. "You said you wus puttin' him out'n his misery."

"Shore," Skeeter barked, "but dat medicine kilt him!"

Little Bit surveyed Skeeter with astonishment. Then he said:

"You's de fust nigger I ever heard of dat kilt a cat; an' I bet you have nine years' bad luck, too!"

A Fugitive from Justine

THIS SHY BIRD FOUND THAT THE SWAN DIVE IS A VERY
POOR PROTECTIVE DEVICE WHEN DIANA, THE
HUNTRESS, DONS HER BATHING SUIT

By George F. Worts

THE record of the earlier days of Carter Pruett Dane is lost in the rainbow mists of hearsay. It is a legend rather than a record, and, inasmuch as those earlier days were Wall Street days, the rumors which, pieced together, form the legend, were probably just as dependable as are the Wall Street rumors of today. For instance:

"Yes, siree, you can take my word for it! Humbug Oil is going up twenty points before the end of the week. I got it straight from the cousin of a fellow who is the boy friend of the girl friend of the girl friend of a fellow who is close to one of old Moneymaker's right-hand men. Humbug Oil is going to make a skyrocket look like a depth bomb."

There was the separate legend pertaining to Carter Dane's arrival on the Street. They say he came to New York from the sticks with a nickel in his pocket, a bottle of sulphur and molasses spring tonic on his hip, and a letter of recommendation from his Sunday school superintendent pinned inside his red woolen undershirt. And, of course, he had an indomitable resolution to make his mark in the world.

So many millionaires have started with that good old-fashioned equipment. Well, it may be true and it may not, about Carter. He was seventeen then, and there was nothing remarkable about him except that he was a perfect wonder at mathematics.

They say he had only to glance at a long column of four-number figures, and he would give you the sum in the twinkling of an eye. There appears to be some foundation for this particular rumor. Certainly, the young man revealed an uncanny understanding of figures as they applied to the ups and downs of stocks.

He had, moreover, a "stock sense," although I have always questioned that rumor, whether applied to him or to any other man. It is easy enough to believe that a man has stock sense after he has cleaned up a half million, but it generally boils down to knowing pretty well what is going to happen before it happens, and shooting the works on that assumption.

But, when Carter Pruett Dane became one of the "theys" on Wall Street, he consistently refused to talk about his earlier days or how he did it. In case you are not familiar with Wall Street, it may be well to mention that the theys are the mysterious power behind the Wall Street throne.

The theys order the rise and fall of the stocks on the big board. It is always they who are responsible for the bottom falling out of the market; it is they who decide that the market is oversold or undersold, and act accordingly; they organize attacks on General Motors or Steel or what have you?

And Carter Pruett Dane was early recognized as one of the theys. The time came when a nod of approval from him concerning some active stock was sufficient to send that issue up ten or twenty points.

He was said to be one of the greatest speculators who ever lived. He shared, with Jesse Livermore, the distinction of being a great boy plunger.

It would be interesting to know how Dane accumulated his first thousand, his first ten thousand, his first million—particularly his first million; and how he felt when he saw his bank balance suddenly expand from the dignity of six figures to the majesty of seven.

Did he slap himself on the flank and

say: "Kid, you're a millionaire! You're good! Gee whiz, but it seems great to have a million dollars all in the same pile! A whole million! Whoops!"?

Or did he immediately cast about for ways to double and triple and quadruple it? Perhaps he did not feel more than a grim determination never to permit the million to shrink.

No millionaire has ever, so far as I know, rendered a clear accounting of the devious steps by which he acquired his first million. There seems to be some mystery about it.

You glean that he was a poor, struggling boy, who arose laughingly at dawn, ate the right kinds of food, exercised regularly, saved his pennies, loved his dear old mother, was kind to all dumb animals, and fraternized with his employees. And suddenly—presto!—he was riding around in the highest priced motor cars, engaging private trains, snubbing old acquaintances, and buying pearls, diamonds, and emeralds by the pint for the second one from the left end in the front row of the chorus.

To be sure, all millionaires have not followed that well-worn road. The point I wish to make is that that first million always seems to be shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

The glamour attaching to any Wall Street power makes it difficult to gather and arrange the plain, unvarnished facts, and the task is made virtually impossible by the men themselves—these theys—because they are always close-mouthed men. To be sure, when one syllable may mean the making or losing of millions, it stands to reason that they would eschew garrulousness. Perhaps this is one explanation of their success. Most of us talk too much.

II

WE are compelled to pass along, in the interests of veracity, to an episode of which the facts are well established. It concerns a young lady in a Broadway musical comedy, who went by the lilting name of Carol Joy.

Now, Carter Pruett Dane had always let women alone. In fact, he was shy with both men and women.

He was once described as a lone wolf of finance, and it was true that, whenever possible, he ran down his quarry alone. He had little to do with pools until he could command them.

He had been brought up on a farm by a

grumpy old grandmother, who honestly believed that a spared rod meant a spoiled child. But the real reason behind his shyness and his stand-offishness was his left arm. It was shorter and less developed than his right arm.

Since he was a child, no one had ever seen Carter Dane's left arm, and he intended that no one ever should. It wasn't an ugly arm, but it wasn't normal, either.

He was terribly sensitive about that arm, and he behaved toward it very much as the ex-Kaiser is reported to have behaved toward that stunted arm of his. Dane always carried his left hand thrust into his coat pocket.

In all other respects he was a normal young man; he was tall, slender, and good-looking in a strictly masculine way. He would have had no difficulty making friends, but, because of his sensitiveness, he kept away from people.

In common with many successful men, his driving force was fear. He was afraid of poverty. He had known poverty and something akin to starvation on the up-State farm, and he wanted to put them as far behind him as he could. Money would do this, and money would buy happiness.

He hadn't had a happy childhood; he was too busy accumulating money as a young man to be happy; his dream was the possession of millions and unlimited happiness. You bought happiness, he supposed, just as you bought anything else. If his theory was right, at the rate he was going he would have a corner on happiness by the time he was thirty.

He was twenty-five when he met Carol Joy, and he had already made his first million. He was the boy plunger, Wall Street's newest and brightest star.

He met Miss Joy at a time when the right woman could have straightened him out and worked wonders with him. With that million behind him, he was ready to relax, to play, to find out how much fun could be had out of life.

Carol was a glorious creature—and so different from the usual stage beauty of fact and fiction. Her charm was that of a budding rose. She was as naïve as a kitten, and lovely to look upon. She was slim and round and alluring. Her eyes were large and blue and trusting. She was sweet!

Carter Dane was cautious, but her sweetness, her girlish simplicity, soon thawed

him. He was like a hungry mouse dreading to emerge from its hole. He would take a little step, then fly back, then a longer step, gathering more courage each time; and each time Carol was there, encouraging him with her sweetness and sympathy.

For the first time Dane knew what it was to enjoy life. He realized how selfish he had been. Now he had something to work for. He wanted Carol to have everything in the world. He wanted her to be young and happy and care-free forever.

Courtship was so much fun to this starved young man! It didn't take him long to find out that young men enamored of young women demonstrated it by lavishing things upon them.

Soon he was sending Carol flowers every day. He had a private telephone wire connected between her apartment and a special sound-proof booth in his office. It was always going to be this way—gay and tender and intense.

It didn't take him long to overcome her aversion to accepting more valuable gifts than flowers and candies. The engagement ring he gave her contained an emerald with a past as black as that of the Indian rajah from whose mine it had come. He gave her an imported limousine for her birthday.

It was exciting, and it was doing the young man a world of good. He was freeing himself from bondage. He began taking more interest in people as persons.

He planned a long vacation abroad for their honeymoon. He went as far as to talk over with Carol, hesitatingly and haltingly, to be sure, his idea of a family. He wanted children. They would live on a beautiful estate, and life would be an endless lark.

She would pat Carter's hand and tell him that he was nothing but a great, big, handsome boy, who would never grow up. She manifested an interest in a real pearl necklace, in a bracelet of square cut diamonds, in a lavallière containing a sapphire as large as a pigeon's egg, that she had seen in jewelers' windows. She got them.

She accomplished all of it with no exertion whatever. She did nothing but smile and gaze at him from those large beautiful blue eyes, and exclaim rapturously over his extravagances. By her very acquiescence she freed Carter Dane from the bondage of his faults, and for her-

self obtained the things she had always childishly craved.

He supplied her with all the attributes he had ever dreamed a perfect woman might have. He credited her with being clever, capable, loyal, and all knowing. He supposed that she adored him. She seemed to. She told him often that he was everything in the world to her—everything!

The ugly truth came out very suddenly. The stock market unexpectedly went to pieces, and Dane was badly caught. In one day he dropped more than half a million—almost half of his fortune. Perhaps his mind hadn't been concentrating on his speculations.

He telephoned to Carol and told her that he was in a bad jam and wouldn't be able to see her for perhaps a day or two. It would take some time, he said, to sort out the salvage from the wreckage.

Carol was, just then, "between engagements"—that is, temporarily out of a job on the stage. It was along about ten o'clock that evening when, satisfied that he had plugged up the holes to the best of his ability, he entered his car and was driven to her apartment.

It was the first time that he had ever really needed her. He was badly shaken by his heavy losses; he wanted her sympathy. He wanted to hold her in his arms and forget his troubles.

III

A FLUSTERED maid let him in. She was new, and she hadn't been instructed. Obviously, Carol hadn't been expecting him.

Carter strode into the living room, stripping off his gloves as he went in. And at the tableau being enacted there, he stopped. It was noteworthy that the first thing he did was to thrust his left hand quickly into his coat pocket.

What he saw was his light of love, his rose girl, his all in all, standing in the center of the room in the arms of a tall, broad-shouldered, darkly tanned youth. She was wearing the filmy lavender negligee that Carter had given her only a few days ago. A gin bottle, nearly empty, stood beside a litter of empty glasses and green ginger ale bottles on a mahogany stand.

The girl's hair was disarranged, standing out from her head in all directions. So was the husky young stranger's.

It was fortunate that Carter Dane didn't have a revolver in his pocket; he would

certainly have killed them both. But all he did was to make an inarticulate sound in his throat, and Carol Joy looked up from the young man's shoulder.

She gazed at Carter dreamily, and her smile was childlike. She could hardly stand up.

"Hello, dad-dee!" she greeted him.

The broad-shouldered young stranger was grinning at him insolently.

"Who is this fellow?" Dane demanded harshly.

"Me?" the young fellow replied. "Why, I'm her new sweetie."

"I see," Carter said, and somehow he got out of the dreadful place.

As if she had not crushed him sufficiently, Carol Joy, a few weeks later, brought suit against Carter Pruett Dane for breach of promise. The newspapers made a great deal of it—"Boy Plunger Sued By Stage Beauty."

It was the same old story, but it is always a good story. He, the Wall Street wolf, had stalked and dragged down this innocent morsel of girlhood; had led her to believe that he wished to wed her; had tired of her and thrown her aside.

The most hardened jury would have brought her in a verdict. In semimourning, on the witness stand, she would have wrung tears from a pawnbroker. She was so delicate, so fragile, so dainty, so inexpressibly lovely.

The only witness who could have upheld Carter Dane's side of the case, the maid, was irretrievably elsewhere.

Carol sued him for a half million and was given a hundred thousand dollar verdict, which Dane did not contest. On the strength of the publicity the trial had given her, she became at once a leading figure in musical comedy circles.

Putting her out of his life—out of his heart—wasn't as difficult as Carter Dane had expected. After all, she had only confirmed his old opinion of women—yes, of people.

They were out to do you, every last mother's son and daughter of them. Give them an inch, and they took a mile. Befriend them, and they stuck a knife into you.

Dane had always suspected that the world was his enemy, and now he was sure of it. What he went through in those first few months cannot be described as unhappiness. It was more complex than that.

But it did not destroy his firm belief that the road to happiness and the road to wealth are parallel thoroughfares.

The trial had almost ruined him, and when it was over he grimly set out building up his fortune again. It wasn't long before he was back on his feet. And it wasn't long before he had passed the million mark again.

He moved into the thirtieth floor of a Park Avenue apartment, where the sounds of the city below came up to him in a faint, pleasant hum, like the buzzing of industrious bees. Here he obtained the illusion of remoteness; he was alone.

It was the one thing he wanted money for—to be alone. He wanted more money, millions, to fortify his security. When he had those millions he knew that he would be happy—the happiest man in the world.

Dane set the mark at six million. He was thirty when this goal was passed, and it dawned on him that he was not happy at all.

Instead of becoming the happiest man in the world, he had become the unhappiest. He had every material thing in the world he had ever dreamed of wanting—and he was miserable.

"The trouble with me," Carter Pruett Dane said to himself one morning when he awoke in his grand apartment, "is that I don't know anybody. If I should die to-morrow, I don't know six men who would be willing to be my pallbearers."

That was a pretty grisly thought, but it was, nevertheless, the grisly truth. No one would care if he died, except, perhaps, the men and women employed in his office, and they would care not because they loved him, but because he was their source of income.

"I have got to start knowing people," Dane developed the idea. "Good Lord, I've already made enough money to retire and live in luxury all the rest of my life. I've got enough. I'm only thirty, and what am I going to do with the rest of my life? Thirty years of just waiting for the grim reaper? Not me!"

It now occurred to him that he must know the right kind of people. Obviously, he couldn't associate with clerks and stenographers. They would be suspicious of his sincerity.

He decided he would crash high society—the exclusive smart set of Long Island. He was rich. They would take him in with

open arms. If they resisted, he would make them take him in.

The market was dull, anyway. Stocks were sluggish; business was poor. He closed his office and went out to Long Island, looking for a desirable estate, and he knew very well that no one in New York would miss him. He had made no friends, not one friend!

He hadn't wanted friends. He had wanted to be alone.

IV

It occurred to Carter Dane from time to time, as he inspected this estate and that, that he might be even lonelier on an estate than in his lofty Park Avenue apartment. He was conscious of the fact that a ghost sat in the limousine beside him; the ghost of a woman.

It wasn't the ghost of Carol Joy; perhaps it was the ghost of what Carol Joy should have been. It was, perhaps, the phantom woman who lives in every man's heart and comes distressingly to life when he begins looking, for example, at homes for sale or rent.

A house is for two or more people, not for a lone man; and as Dane went from estate to estate, trying to find one that precisely fitted his fancy, the ghost woman accompanied him and made him lonelier and lonelier.

He found finally just the place he wanted. It was the estate of old man Pimmington, president of the Cotton and Grain Exchange National, who had gone broke through unwise speculations; and Carter Dane bought it as casually as you or I would buy a pair of shoes.

It was really a gorgeous place. A high brick wall surrounded it; a crushed blue-stone drive led through acres of pines to the hilltop on which the house was built.

It had conservatories, where exotic fruit and flowers grew all year round; it commanded a magnificent view of the Sound, and among its desirable items was the most beautiful swimming pool Carter had ever seen.

It was such a swimming pool as some luxury loving old Roman emperor might have reveled in. In shape it was a long, narrow oval.

It was paved with silver mosaic, and the side walls were fanciful patterns in silver and lapis lazuli. In the center was a tiny pavilion overgrown with crimson rambler,

and the flowers were in bloom when Carter saw the place and bought it.

Carter Dane did not buy the estate; what he bought was the swimming pool, not because he was a lover of swimming, but because the pool enchanted him. It was a dream come true.

The pool was ten feet deep at one end and shallow at the other. At the deep end a springboard, white enameled, projected.

Dane moved in, staffed his estate with servants, with butlers and maids and gardeners and chauffeurs and chefs, and proceeded, first of all, to make it trespasser proof. Before he ventured forth upon his raid on high society, he wanted to enjoy his aloneness.

He was the master, the undisputed king of a domain of two hundred of the choicest acres on Long Island. He enjoyed the thrill of treading upon land that was his own; it was different from the Park Avenue apartment. And for a time he reveled in it.

Always the pool drew him. He liked to sit on the edge of it and stare into the silvery oval. And there was the Sound in the distance, and, on clear days, he could see the hills of Connecticut.

The pool enticed him. He swam every day—alone. He learned to dive.

And, as he was what is called a perfectionist, he wished to swim perfectly, to dive perfectly. He could not be content with mediocrity in either branch.

True, he did not aspire to swim the English Channel, but he wanted his form to be above criticism. For whom? For no one in the world but Carter Pruett Dane.

At the beaches he watched others, and in secret he practiced swimming and diving. He practiced the trudgeon and the six-beat crawl, and he practiced the swan dive and the jackknife and the back dive until he knew that his form was perfect.

No one watched him. Gardeners ceased their work in the vicinity of the pool and went elsewhere when Carter Dane came down for his morning swim. These were his orders.

Not even his servants were to see that somewhat stunted left arm of his. Since he was a child, no one had ever seen it, and he was determined that no one ever should; he daily renewed this fierce vow to himself.

Presently Dane grew lonesome. He decided to inaugurate his organized attack

upon the Long Island smart set. It was characteristic of him to go about this forcefully. He wasn't going to ease his way in; he was going to smash his way in.

He knew a young man who belonged to the Wynbrook Country Club. Carter Dane had once employed him. His name was Jessop Ames, and he was a member of the smart set to which his former employer now aspired. Dane knew that Ames was poor, and he knew that Ames would do what he wanted for value received.

He made a cold out-and-out cash proposition to the young man that took his breath away. Carter Pruett Dane was promptly introduced at the Wynbrook Country Club. It was one of the most exclusive clubs on Long Island. Dane's name was put up for membership, and he was promptly blackballed.

But there were other ways of smashing into the Long Island smart set, and, under Jessop Ames's tutelage, Carter Dane undertook them. He made his appearance at a number of lawn parties and large teas. All of them were large affairs.

He discovered that croquet had become a hobby among these fashionable people. He ordered a croquet set and had it erected on a square of lawn near his swimming pool. Here he diligently practiced.

He must excel, you see, at anything he tried. His sense of inferiority demanded this form of compensation. Grimly he played the game.

But all his efforts to gain an entrée to the smart set of Long Island somehow brought no results. Jessop Ames was acceptable. To some of the affairs he could drag Carter Dane, and to others Carter Dane could not be dragged. He put up Dane's name again at Wynbrook, and again the candidate's eligibility was frankly denied.

Hostesses were curt with him. He was surprised that his wealth counted for so little.

He was a man of affairs. He was one of the greatest speculators on the Street, and he was given the same kind of attention that, perhaps, welcomed Captain Kidd when he dropped in for a friendly visit at one of the West Indian towns.

A goodly few fawned upon him; but Carter Dane eliminated them automatically. People who fawned upon him were beneath him.

He wished that some one would give

him a different kind of look, a look that was neither forbidding nor fawning. And the wish was hardly made before it was granted.

V

HER name was Justine Winwood, and he was presented to her one afternoon during a game of croquet at a lawn party, with a number of other young people who had just come up. Carter Dane repeated her name. It was his custom to repeat people's names when introduced, for the sake of accuracy.

He never forgot a name or a face. He repeated her name—Miss Winwood—and he accepted the small, tanned hand she presented to him.

The look she gave Carter surprised him. It was neither forbidding nor fawning. It was level and knowing and mischievous.

Something told Carter Dane that he had known this girl somewhere before, and, although he racked his brain, he could not recall where or when or how. She seemed to be laughing at him, but in a very friendly way.

He indifferently took note of the fact that she was dark eyed, boyishly bobbed, and dressed in a shade of pale green that reminded him of confectionery. She was really a beautiful girl, but that fact made little impression on the young man.

He began meeting Miss Winwood wherever he went, and always she gave him that same curious, knowing, twinkling look. It wasn't the contemptuous look he was accustomed to, although it had something of contempt in it.

He had a few opportunities to talk to her, and whenever he took the occasion, he had the impression that behind her eyes and behind her voice was laughter. Yet he could never, somehow, gather the courage to ask her bluntly what it was about him that amused her. Perhaps this was her attitude toward all men.

Carter Dane found out from Jessop Ames that Justine Winwood had, herself, only recently been elected to the inner circle on which his own efforts were so savagely concentrated. Her father had made a killing in Cobalt gold mine stock; had risen abruptly from comparative poverty to affluence.

She, too, was a crasher. She had been, previously, a private secretary.

Always, it seemed, she was on hand when

he was playing croquet. He would look up, after he had made a good, clean shot, and find her provocative gaze upon him.

But no matter how well he played, she never gave the smallest sign of approval. She always wore that mocking look, as if she had a huge joke on him.

That old-fashioned game had become a passion with the exclusive Long Islanders. Tournaments soon were organized. Carter Dane, because of his skill, was, for the first time, in real demand.

He was determined to win the croquet championship of Long Island. It was, he realized, a childishly absurd aspiration, but that did not prevent him from practicing in secret on the court near his swimming pool.

He would show these people that he could excel at something. He went about winning that championship as determinedly as he had gone about amassing a fortune.

He became the Long Island croquet champion one fierce August afternoon. When the silver cup was presented to him, he looked into the crowds.

Yes; the girl in green was there, only this time she was in lavender. She was looking at him with that queer little grin.

She wasn't applauding. She hadn't applauded a play he had made. He was, curiously, angry at the girl.

He saw her coming toward him, and he escaped. He had the feeling that she had been deliberately pursuing him, but not for the reason that a girl ordinarily pursues a young man. He realized now that he had been trying to keep away from her for some time.

Something was wrong somewhere. Something was wrong with him. He had, by playing a silly game with his forceful methods, finally accomplished the thing that he had set out to do.

He had crashed the smart set of Long Island. The attitude of every one about him proved to him that he had succeeded.

Well, what of it? Jessop Ames would put up his name again at Wynbrook, and they would take him in. By watching his step he would force his way further in.

The time might come, conceivably, when he would dictate socially to these people. All it required was determination, cleverness, and money—and he had all three.

That evening, returning to his estate, having refused a number of invitations at

which he would have jumped a week previously, he realized that life had gone sour on him again. His whole life was, somehow, a grim joke—on himself.

He was utterly unable to capture the thing that he sought. What had he been shooting at, anyhow? He had everything in the world he had ever wished for, and that night he was the unhappiest man alive. Why had he missed, and why—yes, why was he afraid of Justine Winwood?

He was afraid of that strange, indescribable look in her eyes, of what was behind that look. Why was he so afraid of what that look portended?

By shunning the places where Justine Winwood would be, he would lose, in a short time, his hard won social gains. And he knew that he would shun them. He knew that his attempts at crashing the inner circle were ended.

He was through. It was absurd, but it was so. He was a fugitive from the look in a girl's eyes.

Well, what was he going to do? Where was he going from here? Next morning he awoke, still wondering where he was going from here. Return to Wall Street, to amass more millions? Stay here and become the millionaire hermit of Long Island? Drink himself to death?

He decided, after breakfast, to take his usual swim. There was always something soothing about a dive into the clear, blue water of that beautiful pool.

He donned his swimming suit, wrapped a beach robe about him, and walked out into the alluring morning. There was dew on the grass, and a mist of lavender fading into delicate blues in the trees. It was a heavenly morning, the kind when a man's heart ought to resemble a jazz orchestra.

Carter Dane's was playing a funeral dirge. He walked along glumly, unconsciously holding the robe about him, to conceal even from the eyes of his servants the shameful difference in his arms. Not a soul was in sight.

It was his world. He owned it.

Reaching the edge of the pool, Dane placed his robe on a marble bench, walked out to the end of the springboard, and contemplated the flawless blue water. Sky and water were the same color.

You were diving into the sky when you dived into that water. The æsthetic values of the moment called unmistakably for a swan dive.

He stepped backward on the board, ran forward, jumped up, came down on his heels with a thud, sprang upward and straightened his body, with arms stretched out on either side, into the graceful inverted arch demanded by the swan dive.

VI

A SHOCKING thing happened while Carter Dane was in mid-air. He had reached the apex of the spring, had straightened out, was poised for the downward plunge, supported by nothing but air for a split second, when at the other end of the pool the bushes parted.

It took Dane perhaps two seconds to reach the water, but in those two seconds he glimpsed a situation that sent a wave of furious blood into his cheeks before his body cleaved the water.

A girl stepped out from the bushes, a girl in a jade green bathing suit and a bright red diving cap. She had slim white legs and arms and an alluring body.

Behind her, on the crushed stone path which led from the main drive to the garage, was parked a dark red roadster.

Carter Dane came up, spluttering. He would now have to stay in the water until he could drive this trespasser off his property. Otherwise, she would see his arm. And he would permit no mortal to see that arm.

As his head emerged from the water, the girl poised for a beautiful shallow dive. She came up and swam toward him. She was doing the six-beat crawl.

When she neared him, Dane recognized her. It was Justine Winwood.

"Good morning!" she said.

Carter Dane, treading water, said nothing. He only looked at her.

"I thought you might be lonely," she remarked.

"I'm not lonely," he pointed out.

"Well," she impertinently replied, "you ought to be. A man who lives the kind of life you do ought to be the loneliest man in the world."

"Whether I'm lonely or not—" Carter Dane angrily began, but she cut him off. "You don't remember me, do you?"

"Of course I remember you!" he answered. He was trying hard to be civil to her. Inwardly he was raging. The impertinence of this girl!

"I mean, you don't remember me—before that," she persisted.

"No," he said, curtly, "I don't."

"It was about eight years ago. It was when you first opened an office on Wall Street. I think I've changed a good deal. I was wearing my hair long then, and I—I was plump. No, of course you wouldn't remember an ordinary little stenographer. I hoped you might. I've been hoping all along you would. You used to smile at me when you went into your office. I've kept that smile wrapped in rose leaves ever since."

Carter Dane was blushing. She was kidding him. He abhorred kidding. It was one of the things his riches saved him from.

One of the rewards of riches was the respect it commanded. And she had smashed down his golden wall.

"You don't believe me?" she persisted. "You don't believe I've been adoring you ever since then?"

He answered her with a freezing glance. He wanted her to go. She had already ruined his day.

"I've followed your career," she said, "ever since you made your first killing. It was in Amalgamated Zinc. I thought you were grand. It's too bad you had to let that—that girl hurt you."

Carter Dane's face, despite the cooling water in which he was immersed, had turned from pink to an alarming magenta.

"If you're going to have a stroke of apoplexy," the audacious young woman suggested, "perhaps you'd better get on dry land."

"I'll stay here until you go," Dane spluttered.

"Why?" she asked. "I want to see you do that swan dive again. I never saw a more beautiful swan dive in my life. I always knew you would dive like that."

Carter Dane paddled toward the side of the pool and grasped the lower ledge.

"Will you kindly go?" he asked. "Will you go before I send one of my men to throw you out?"

VII

DISMAY came into Miss Winwood's large dark eyes.

"Do you really mean that?" she gasped.

"I certainly do, Miss Winwood."

"I can't believe it," she murmured, more to herself than to him. "I thought you'd be glad to see me. You ought to be glad. Do you really prefer being alone?"

"I do!" he snapped.

"Don't you want any friends? Don't you want anybody to play with—ever?" And when he did not answer, she said: "I suspected it. I suspected it when I saw you playing through that silly tournament. You've made yourself your own worst enemy. You have everything in the world you want, but the one thing you want most. And I dare you to deny it! Oh, I know all about you, Mr. Carter Pruett Dane! I know just why you turned sour, too! It was Carol Joy!"

"I'm not sour!" he raged.

"You are! And you're a rotten sport, too! You're nothing but a machine. Can't you see it yourself? Were you playing croquet when you played through these matches? You were not! You were a machine gun, that's all you were! Were you getting any fun out of it? You were not! You weren't winning something for yourself; you were destroying something for others. Revenge! That's the whole trouble with you, and I'm going to get this out of my system if you drown me for it!"

"Go on!" Carter Dane groaned.

"You bet I'll go on! Carol Joy had the chance to make a peach of a man out of you, and how that little fool flopped the job! She ruined your life. She soured you on the world. Do you know what you're headed for, Mr. Carter Dane? You're headed for a sour old age! Yes, you are! You're a rotten sport, and if you don't turn over a new leaf in a mighty big hurry—"

"I'm not a rotten sport!" he shouted.

"Then I dare you to go up on that springboard and do another swan."

"Why should I?"

"You're afraid! You're afraid to have me see your arm! As if I cared a darn about your arm! Go up there and dive!"

Carter Dane clung to the ledge. His mind was whirling. This girl had absolutely unsettled him.

Well, he would show her! He didn't care a damn, now, about that arm. He strode to the springboard. He looked down frowningly at her.

She was floating on her back, looking up at him. Her face was as white as a sheet. So was his, by this time.

It was really a terrific moment. Something tremendous seemed to hang upon this dive. It was as if his very life were at stake.

Dane ran out on the springboard. He

jumped on the white rubber mat at the end. He sprang upward and outward.

In mid-air, with that girl looking at him, he knew that he was not going to do a swan dive. Whatever he was going to do, it was not going to be a swan dive.

Shame swept over him in a hot flood when he realized just what was happening. He was going to do an amateurish thing—for the first time in his life—before the critical gaze of another human being, and a girl, at that.

He tried to straighten his fine, lean body into the prescribed graceful arch. He only succeeded in flopping about in the air like a great clumsy fish out of water.

He came down with a smash that splattered water onto both sides of the tank. In vulgar terms, he executed a perfectly marvelous belly smasher.

"My God!" a sweet voice exclaimed as he came up, his chest and stomach stinging from the thwack.

She started to laugh, but stopped. Then she laughed and laughed. Something seemed to be bursting in Carter Dane's chest. Tears of some emotion spurted into his eyes.

And he suddenly was laughing. He nearly strangled as he started on a six-beat crawl for the edge of the pool.

Miss Winwood had pulled herself out and was sitting with her slim, beautiful legs hanging down into the water. She was doubled over with merriment.

"I — knew — you — were — going to d-d-d-do that!" she gurgled. "Say, how does it feel to be a flop in public?"

"I don't mind," said Dane strangely. He was foolishly elated. Something had happened to him.

"I think," said the girl, "that there is hope for you. You ought to be very, very glad I ran the gantlet and crashed the gate. If you'd only let me do it, I could reform you."

VIII

He pulled himself out of the pool and sat down beside her. For some curious reason he was grateful to this girl.

She had vaulted his gold wall. She had crashed the gate of his precious reserve. She had, mysteriously and with the swiftness of light, undone what he had been striving all his life to do.

"I want to know," he asked, "why you came in here this way?"

"I want you to be honest with me," he added sternly.

"I? Honest?" she repeated, looking at him with sparkling eyes. "I don't know how to be anything else. I came in here because—because—"

She turned her eyes quickly away.

"Why?" he said sternly.

She looked back. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Why, you darned fool, I'm in love with you!" she said gently.

"Gee whiz!" Carter Dane exclaimed.

"And I hated to see you going to the devil the way you were," she went on. "I wanted to drag you out of all this privacy and seclusion and grimness—and—and make you human!"

"Well," Dane inquired, "will you keep up the good work? I need you. I've needed you all my life."

She looked at him curiously.

"I am tempted to make you be specific, but it will never be said of Justine Winwood that she pursued any male!" the girl declared. "If you want me, you will have to pursue me. You will have to show me that you are a mighty earnest young man."

"I will give you a rush that will take your breath away!"

"You will have to stop taking yourself seriously."

"You bet I will!"

"You will have to open your heart to the world."

"I will."

"You will have to learn to play for fun's sake, and not as if you were a machine gun."

"I'll do all that—and more."

He bent eagerly toward her. He was grinning happily. The doors of life had opened wide for Carter Pruett Dane.

"Do you really think you are going to like me?" she asked.

His reply was enthusiastic.

"I am already head over heels in love with you! I am crazy about you. I think you are the most beautiful girl in the world, as well as the wisest."

She considered him thoughtfully.

"I think you mean all that," she said gravely. "And I am going to let you seal the bargain with a kiss. But—hey—hold on! Wait a minute! Before you get the kiss you have to go out on that springboard and do another flopper just like the last one!"

And Carter Dane, multimillionaire, went eagerly to the springboard.

THE FRIENDLY FOREST

THE loneliest place I've ever known

Was in a city's crowded street,
I walked with thousands—yet alone!

With no familiar face to greet!
But in the forest's depths—wide—free—

And with no other human near,
A thousand voices spoke to me
In tones at once serene and clear!

The murmur of each wind-stirred leaf
Was full of quiet friendliness,
To foster joy or banish grief;
To exorcise; or, soothing, bless!
The soft light sifting through the trees
Was as a friend's familiar smile;
Each fern and brake which brushed my knees,
Seemed coaxing me to stay awhile!

The brook, swift-hast'ning on its way,
Sang with a clear and merry note
Throughout the long and happy day;
Mid shadows, or where sunbeams smote!
The thrushes and the warblers vied
To bid me welcome to the glade;
And blest is he who may abide
With them, amid the forest's shade!

Clarence Mansfield Lindsay

Accusing Voices

INSPECTOR DUCASTEL, OF THE PARIS DETECTIVE BUREAU,
DISCUSSES THE SO-CALLED "THIRD DEGREE," AND
STAGES A STRIKING TEST OF HIS METHODS

By John D. Swain

I SAT in a tidy little room, as bare as a monk's cell, in the Palais de Justice, facing Louis Ducastel across a small, plain desk. On the desk were neat packets of letters, a large inkwell, a pen, and an even larger ash tray, made, as Inspector Ducastel told me, from a guillotine blade—a blade worn out against the soft throats of thousands of unhappy ones during the Revolution.

I was in the very heart of the Paris Detective Bureau—the Centre, as it is familiarly termed. I had come there to say good-bye to M. Ducastel, and to thank him for his services to me in the matter which had brought me from New York—the extradition of a noted murderer. The affair having terminated to my satisfaction, I had booked a passage on the Richelieu, sailing the following week.

As men in every branch of life will talk shop when they have an interest in common, we had been idly chatting of the difference of opinion concerning the application of what is commonly called the third degree. Although strongly opposed to inflicting actual physical injury on any man, even if convinced of his guilt, I held, with most of the Anglo-Saxon police authorities, that, in the case of stolid and unimaginative suspects, a certain amount of brutality, and even of pain, was sometimes necessary.

"Pain is the lowest common denominator of the human race," I reminded my confrère. "It is the one sensation to which every individual responds, in his own degree. This is particularly true of the criminal who is really too stupid to think, who holds no beliefs of any kind, and hence is immune to superstition or fear, save the fear of being hurt."

Inspector Ducastel smiled indulgently, and lighted a thin and very pungent cigar.

"We of the Sûreté would feel supremely humiliated were we ever obliged to inflict pain, or the fear of pain, upon one whom we are interrogating, *monsieur*," he answered courteously. "If a man be not insane, or an idiot, then he will surely respond to a sufficiently skillful questioning. The voices that accuse him may not always be audible. They may echo from his own guilty heart; and even though he be, as you say, a stolid and unimaginative man, yet there exists some manner of piercing beneath that thick crust of callous indifference deep down to the tiny flame of inherited superstition from which none of us is entirely free. I myself, I assure you, regret exceedingly if I behold the new moon over the wrong shoulder, and never do I willingly walk underneath a ladder. I dare to venture the belief that *monsieur* himself has some pet superstition."

I laughed, a trifle sheepishly.

"Well, I am annoyed when a black cat crosses my path. After all, however, this has little to do with breaking down and obtaining a confession from a suspect."

Ducastel shrugged.

"To the contrary, my friend, it may have everything to do with it; for on a knowledge of these little weaknesses and foibles and fads depends our method of approach. First, we must know everything physical concerning the crime; and our body of nearly three hundred specialists of the Centre supply us with this knowledge. Then we must know the character of our suspect. Supplied with these two necessary facts, the rest becomes a problem of mathematics. Of course we depend very largely on the element of surprise. A

criminal, knowing in advance what is before him, or thinking that he knows, naturally prepares himself for the ordeal. He fortifies his resolution, steels his nerves, and arranges cunning replies to the questions he anticipates. It is then our task to lead him along the road he has foreseen until his suspicions are lulled; and then, at the proper moment—the psychological moment, not so?—to spring our surprise. The surprise may be in itself unimportant, but it terrifies him because he has prepared no defense against it, and because his mind cannot in an instant grasp its possible scope. He is thrown off his stride, and his self-confidence is shaken. He fears that we are holding other weapons in reserve. In an instant he becomes a different subject—timorous, vacillating, *afraid*; and his fear is very much more intense than the fear of a mere bodily pain, inasmuch as the mind is a far more delicate thing than the body. This is true even of the mind of a brutal and ignorant thug.”

As we sat in this little whitewashed cell, with its immaculate file standing against one wall, a couple of shelves of reference books overhead, and a telephone at hand, there passed through from time to time certain small and soft-footed individuals going about their various tasks. The Paris detectives are small men. There are a few, of exceptional ability, who happen to be big fellows; but the old rule stands, that a detective agent shall not exceed five feet seven inches in height, or one hundred and fifty pounds in weight.

Unlike the practice of our own country and Great Britain, these detectives are not ex-policemen. Few, or none of them, have ever pounded the pavements. A group of them resemble a college faculty, embracing chemists, biologists, engineers, mathematicians, and linguists.

Ducastel himself specialized in homicide cases; and I listened to him with respect, if with some slight incredulity, because of his international record. By his energy and genius an entire regiment of killers had been obliged to pay the supreme penalty. It was he who at this very time was in charge of the recent murder case on the Rue Marbeuf.

“A case in point,” he commented, perhaps sensing that I still clung with Yankee obstinacy to my own ideas of the third degree. “Has *monsieur* followed the Donnay affair?”

I admitted that I read the idiomatic French newspapers with some difficulty, and that while I knew about the murder in a general way, I had not followed it with much attention.

“It was a *crime passionnel*,” he went on; “one of the commonest and simplest, and at the same time most troublesome cases we are called upon to solve. A pretty young woman is killed by her lover. The lover is in custody, stoutly protesting his innocence, and we are no less stoutly convinced that his was the hand that destroyed her. It will not bore you too much if I briefly recapitulate the details? Very good!”

Ducastel lighted another thin black cigar, and I one of my own cigarettes, brought with me from America. He leaned back in his chair, his dark eyes dreamy, and a little melancholy, gazing up toward the ceiling as if he saw, through the villainous smoke of his cigar, vague figures hovering about his head and trying to communicate with him.

II

COLETTE DONNAY, he told me, was a member of *la haute bicherie*, the upper crust of the half world. She was about twenty-six or possibly twenty-eight years old, lovely in face and form, and exquisitely gowned, of course. She had *chic*; and in a sisterhood where beauty and a nimble wit are universal, or nearly so, she outshone all the rest. She had exceptional opportunities to be a digger of gold, as the quaint Americans phrase it. She made game of millionaires and diplomatists, war profiteers, painters and authors of repute. From each she took what she chose—the name of one, the big car of another, a villa at Biarritz from a third, and, naturally, money and jewels from all.

She was thrifty, too. She had money in bank, and a magnificent collection of precious stones, valuable paintings, oriental rugs, Chinese jades and lacquer, and costly furniture.

Also, she had talent. Possessed of a really magnificent voice, she might easily have won both fame and fortune as a concert singer, had she not been too indolent and pleasure loving to practice the self-denial needful to develop her voice and keep her physical fitness. Some of her popular songs had been recorded for the phonograph, and brought her a small royalty—probably the only honest money she ever

earned. Such is the pathetic struggle of human nature to maintain some fragment of self-respect, that it was known that all the money she received from this source was given to the church, or to personal charities. She wished these sums to be free from taint, it would appear.

She lived off the Champs Élysées, in an apartment on the Rue Marbeuf—a little jewel of an apartment, on the first floor, in a house filled with other similar “nests,” though none were so gorgeous as hers. She moved, when she chose, in respectable society. Not, you understand, that she was received in the homes of these others; but she brushed elbows with them at exhibitions, fêtes, balls, all sorts of affairs, knew many of them, and spoke freely with them.

As *monsieur* knows, we look upon certain things with an older and less censorious eye than do your compatriots. So long as one is presentable and amusing, who shall search too deeply into his or her private affairs?

Paris is the most tolerant city in the world. All classes from time to time amuse themselves by making a little pilgrimage into the underworld; and perfect courtesy prevails between the visitors and the Apaches. The old nobility and the bourgeoisie mingle to some extent, and within very definite limits, with the demimonde. We respect one another's privacy, and ask only that degree of conformity which entitles one to the privilege of admission to a general gathering.

It was the *concierge* who notified the police that something was wrong in Mlle. Donnay's apartment. The *concierges* of Paris, as *monsieur* knows, are more or less closely in touch with the police. They serve as unpaid and unofficial observers of the comings and goings, and the habits, of their tenants.

Old Martin noticed certain little things which, to an experienced *concierge*, were warnings that all was not right. It was past noon, but the morning newspaper lay untouched before the door, and there were fresh rolls and a bottle of milk at the service door in the rear. He had reason to know that the young woman was in her apartment, but he could not hear her moving about as usual. He did hear, however, the persistent and somehow sinister barking of a little toy dog that she kept.

Martin, therefore, notified the agent of police on his street, when next that official

passed. Ultimately it was decided to get a locksmith and look within.

The main room, or living room, was in terrible disorder. Things were overturned and broken as if a madman had run wild there. There was blood spattered on the delicately papered wall behind the *chaise longue*, upon which, on her side, lay the body of Colette Donnay, quite cold. Her throat had been cut, her silk boudoir gown was torn to shreds, and there were bruises on her wrists and arms.

A little wall safe, cunningly concealed in the paneling about the fireplace, was empty, its door hanging open, having been forced by some stout tool. Every drawer in the apartment, and several trunks, had been flung open, and their contents were scattered about in the utmost confusion.

Nothing was touched, of course, until the police commissioner of the quarter arrived. After a careful inspection of the scene and the body, he called in the detectives from the local *sûreté*; and their *commissaire*, feeling instinctively that here was a case likely to prove baffling, applied to the Centre for assistance. Whereupon, I was placed in charge.

Our procedure was in conformity with invariable custom. We left things undisturbed, while our photographers took pictures from every possible angle, and an engineer made measurements. We made an itemized list of every item, however trifling, that was in the room. We made a careful search for finger-prints. It was routine work—the same thing that *monsieur* would do in like circumstance, save that, perhaps, we were more meticulous about trifles, and took more photographs.

All this consumed much time; but when at last the poor, mangled body of the Donnay woman was sent to the Morgue, we had reason to feel that as perfect a picture as possible had been obtained of the conditions that prevailed in her apartment on the night of her demise.

We were at once confronted by certain outstanding features. Without wearying you by going too deeply into our methods, I may say that we proved to our entire satisfaction that the murderer was not a stranger, but one well known to the victim, and indeed expected as a guest. There had been a *souper à deux*, as proved by the undisturbed table set up in the small kitchen nook.

It was in this kitchen that the small dog

had been closed after—or perhaps prior to—the murder. A canary was singing in its cage while we went about our labors. One of our agents fed it and put fresh water into the cage.

It was nearly certain that valuable jewels had been stolen by the assassin, for there were none such in the two safe deposit boxes maintained by Colette at her bank. Moreover, it was clearly evident that he had made a thorough and even devastating search for something else besides valuables. What was it? Obviously, something that would tend to incriminate him.

Not a single material clew had he left behind him. Much to our surprise and disappointment, when the finger-print experts had developed their photographs, there were no marks that pointed to the killer. True, there were many finger-prints, and of numerous people. They were everywhere—on books, cigarette and cigar boxes, bottles, plates, chairs; but these were all old markings. Whatever prints the assassin had left, he had been at pains to obliterate. The dishes from which they had eaten were washed and scoured clean, though stale food remained in pots and pans on the electric stove. Many articles of furniture revealed a careful rubbing, presumably that any fatal prints might be destroyed.

It was possible, from the bluish bruises on the woman's arms and wrists, to get a general idea of the size of the hand that had grasped her so brutally; but nothing more definite than this. No weapon was found, naturally. No drops of blood led from the apartment to the hall. It was established that the murderer left by way of a window opening on a side alley, which accounted for the fact that he was not observed by the *concierge*, nor by any one in the neighborhood. It was probable that he also entered the same way; a fire escape permitted this.

What then, was it, that had occupied him—or her—for a considerable time after the crime? For what had he been frantically seeking?

Without doubt, a letter; and as it was possible that the murderer's search had been unavailing, one of our experts, who devotes his attention to the discovery of cunningly hidden objects, spent a full day before he found a letter slipped into the space underneath the removable pan of the

canary's cage. There was nothing else there, but it was enough. It was a brief note, written two days before, to Colette Donnay. It read:

Shall call on you, my angel, late to-morrow night. It is important that I see you; do not disappoint thy—
JULES.

We were not surprised at the discovery of such a note. Already we had learned from the postman who served the apartment that on this day a single letter had been delivered to the Donnay woman; and cursory search had failed to reveal any bearing this date lying about in her rooms. She might have destroyed it, of course, though her wastebasket, apparently, had not been emptied for several days; at least, we found in it missives of a prior date.

The patching together of all torn scraps in this basket was another wearisome and fruitless task. A great deal must be done unavailingly, in order that a very little may be learned; but who am I to remind my distinguished colleague of this truism? At any rate, there, in its singular repository, was this damning letter, indicating that on the night of the murder, one Jules came to see her—or, at least, that he had expected to come.

Why, then, had this inconsequential and almost brusque note been preserved by Colette? I ask you, *monsieur*, who of us can fathom the motives of a woman? Perhaps—since it was easily established that this Jules was her lover—she was in the habit of saving his last letter, to be destroyed when another came. Who knows? A woman constructs an edifice of sentiment upon the flimsiest foundations.

However, we need not concern ourselves with the psychology of the affair. There was the letter; it had not been found by Jules, minute as had been his search.

The next step, to be sure, was the arrest of Jules; but first we waited until he was absent from his rooms in another part of the city, and made of them as strict a search as we had of the Donnay's. It was fruitless. There were no clothes in his abundant wardrobe that showed a spot of blood. There was no weapon. There were many letters, and from many different women, including Colette; but these told us nothing we did not know.

What is it that endears a man to a woman? Here was Colette Donnay, able to pick and choose for her friend almost

any presentable man about the boulevards whose money rendered him attractive; and for her *ami* she selected Jules Magnaud, a rough, uncouth, phlegmatic creature, who had been a sailor in his youth, and had risen, by the power of his fists and a certain adaptability, to be first officer of mercantile vessels. Retiring a year or so ago, he devoted himself to Colette, whom he met at a cabaret in Montmartre, and who immediately became infatuated with him.

It was proved that she gave him large sums of money, besides making him valuable presents. They frequently went away together for trips to Monte Carlo, to London, to Switzerland, to the *plages* where gambling and high life prevail. He was a regular visitor to her apartment. The last time he had been seen to go there was about ten days before the murder. He had since been at Boulogne on some business of his own. We investigated that, of course, but without result for our purposes.

Behold us, then, at this *impasse*—Jules Magnaud visits his sweetheart on the night of the crime; they meet amicably and dine together in her little kitchen. Later they quarrel; the sound of altercation is heard in the apartment opposite, also the one overhead; but altercations are all too common in this quarter of irregular alliances, and nobody seems to have suspected anything at all serious.

It is known that Jules was financially distressed, having lost heavily at cards. Probably he made demands upon Colette at which even her infatuation balked. Perhaps she was jealous, and thought he was spending her money on other women—as doubtless he was. In a fury, he strikes her down, she reviles him, his ugly temper makes him insane, he kills her.

Then, remembering the letter he wrote advising her of his arrival that evening, on a matter of importance—that is, the need of funds—he makes diligent search for it; for well he realizes how damning such evidence would be, if found. His utmost efforts failing, he probably concludes that Colette herself had destroyed the note when read. At any rate, he departs mysteriously, leaving no trace.

This, then, is one of many similar cases that we of the Centre must unravel. Attend, *monsieur*—it is our task to extort a confession from this Jules Magnaud. We have no proof that will convict him, and he knows that we have not, or believes so.

He also knows, to a degree, what our process will be, and prepares himself for it. The man was a type—one of those to whom you and your confrères would feel it obligatory to apply the third degree in your own way; that is, to rouse fear in him by means of pain, and the threat of yet more pain. For he is coarse, unimaginative, unfeeling, stolid.

Nevertheless, we went about the business according to our custom. At no time was Magnaud treated otherwise than as an ordinary suspect. He was interrogated for long hours, and over a period of days, by the *juge d'instruction* of the district, who established his court in a vacant apartment in the same house where the body was found, with a secretary to take notes, a police agent or two, and myself.

Nothing results. The prisoner insists that he was elsewhere on that night. Of course he has an alibi of sorts, since men of his sort can always, for a price, or by threats, get some worthless creatures to perjure themselves by swearing that they saw him at a certain hour and place, far removed from the scene of crime. Such testimony is easy to establish and difficult to disprove. The alibi is the oldest form of defense known, and, when true, the most effective.

The *juge* commits Magnaud to a cell in the Santé, there to be kept *au secret* for the present. Meanwhile, nothing is said to him of the letter discovered in the canary's cage. That will be used later, when every other means has failed.

Just how to use it to the best advantage does not at first appear; for observe, *monsieur*, damaging as it is to him, after all it does not prove that he was in the apartment that night. Lovers have ere now changed their minds, have written or telephoned that they were coming, and then gone elsewhere.

A sort of animal cunning had led Jules, at one point in his interrogation, to state that it had been his half formed intention to call on Colette that fatal night, but that something had caused him to abandon his purpose. He was hypocritical enough to weep and cry out that he wished to God he had not altered his plans, but had been there to save his sweetheart.

"*Rigolo!*" he wept. "Was it not cruel luck, *monsieur le juge?*"

From which you will perceive that he was a man of effrontery and impudence.

Monsieur is well acquainted with our famous custom of "reconstructing" the scene of the crime, and then confronting the accused. This has been played up many times in fiction and on the stage. It is one of our most effective devices, and, indeed, what can be more sinister in its effect on the guilty? No doubt, then, Jules Magnaud, who was no fool, had prepared himself for such a confrontation. We could not surprise him with it; but we could do this—from day to day we could lead him to expect that he was about to be subjected to the ordeal, and then, by postponing it, prey on his mind and work on his nerves.

If he had any nerves, however, he did not show it. Watched closely every moment of the twenty-four hours, he manifested none of the symptoms of breaking down for which we were so eagerly looking. He slept soundly, or seemed to do so. At any rate, he lay motionless, with his eyes closed, nearly seven hours each night. He ate as well as a hearty man who is confined closely can be expected to do.

Meanwhile, he was treated well. He suffered no pain and no verbal abuse, unless the severe questioning of the *juge d'instruction* may be termed such. He had a decent bed, with plenty of blankets, and enough to eat of wholesome if not very dainty food.

There being no reason for further delay, it was decided to bring him to the reconstructed apartment of Colette Donnay, upon which his eyes had never rested since the night he stole away from it with her blood on his hands and her jewels—it is to be presumed—in his pocket. To be sure, he had made no effort to sell the jewels, and we had not been able to find any trace of them.

In the reconstruction no single detail, however trivial, had been overlooked. There had been upon Colette's expensive phonograph one of the records of her splendid voice, and perhaps they had run it off that same night. One of the tenants recalled hearing singing, but could not say what the song had been, or whether it was a human voice or a recorded one. The canary was perched in its cage. The little dog was locked in the kitchen, in charge of an agent. The furniture was arranged as on the fatal night; even the fragments of broken glass, the torn hangings, the upset wastebasket, were identical. The clock was wound and

set at the hour of midnight—at which time, by the testimony of neighbors, there had been sounds of altercation.

"And now *monsieur* asks himself," said Inspector Ducastel, "what took place? How we could hope to break down the iron resolution of a man who already knew what to expect, who had fortified himself to endure it unflinchingly, who knew precisely how the room looked that night, and who was moreover of such callous heart that he seemed to suffer no remorse, had scornfully refused the offices of the prison priest, and had spent his time idly reading the sporting papers in his cell? My answer to this is that nothing has taken place—absolutely nothing whatever."

I cried out in my surprise at his smiling admission. Ducastel looked at his wrist watch and rose from his desk.

"It is like this, *mon ami*," he went on. "Wishing to give my good confrère an inside view of the affair, that he may form his own conclusions, and being willing to put my theories, tested over so many years, to the test, I have arranged to take you with me to see for yourself what shall happen. The ordeal of Jules Magnaud is due now. They only await word from me that I am leaving the Palais de Justice. Shall we come?"

More moved than I can tell, I accepted this strange invitation. Ducastel placed his hat firmly upon his head, and took his stick and gloves.

"*Soit!* Let us see if we can *gober sa chèvre!* Let us try if we can get his goat!"

"Are you not yourself a trifle nervous over the outcome, at this critical point?" I ventured to ask.

"*C'est un peu mon métier*," he replied. "It's all a part of my trade."

He waved his stick, and a taxi-auto drew up before the dark tunnel from which we had emerged on the street.

III

THERE was no crowd about the apartment in the Rue Marbeuf when we arrived. One or two of the tenants passed in or out as we stood for a moment before the entrance, where two police agents were posted to see that no unauthorized persons loitered about or gained admission.

We walked up the single flight of stairs, and Ducastel unlocked a door. At once, and without further preparation, the ghastly scene was before my eyes.

The room was fully lighted, and looked as if the struggle of which there were so many evidences had taken place no more than an hour before. As we opened the door, a tiny yellow bird, perched in its cage, began to chirp. This homely incident cast a strange chill upon me; but what drew from me a sharp cry of genuine distress was the body of a young woman, lying at one end of the room, upon a gilt *chaise longue*. One arm and hand trailed down to the floor, bloodless, inert. Her head, half turned toward us, revealed a white face with closed eyes, heavily fringed; and across the throat was a seemingly fresh slash, on which the blood had scarcely dried!

For some reason I had not counted on finding the body of poor Colette Donnay here, just as it was discovered by the *concierge*. Ducastel cast a look of faint surprise upon me, and hesitated for an instant before stepping inside.

"Of a surety, *monsieur* had not expected that we would omit the one important detail. That would be, as you say, to produce 'Hamlet' without the young Dane, *hein?*"

I felt a trifle ashamed that my nerves had betrayed me before a rival. Had I not, during many years' service as a police official, looked upon almost every conceivable tragedy? Had I not beheld horrors that the imagination does not like to reenact? I quickly regained control of my nerves, at the same time wondering, if the scene reacted so powerfully upon my hardened senses, how must Jules Magnaud, the assassin, feel when he first looked upon the room he had left a fortnight since, thinking himself secure from arrest!

Ducastel led the way across the room, and pulled aside a *portière*, beyond which was a little dressing cabinet.

"We will post ourselves here," he said. "If *monsieur* will humor me by not making his presence known to the accused, I shall be busy observing his attitude."

"We are alone, then?" I asked.

"There is an agent in the kitchen with the little dog," he answered absent-mindedly, pulling at the *portière*, so that while he could look through it into the room beyond without missing anything, he himself could not be observed. I silently placed myself beside him.

Scarcely had we done so when we heard the tramp of feet in the hall outside, and

once more the door opened. This time it was roughly thrust inward, and the figure of a man seemed to be propelled through and into the room.

I was looking upon Jules Magnaud, undoubtedly the murderer of that lovely girl whose body silently accused him from across the room. He was a rough-looking fellow, yet with a certain admirable strength about forehead and jaw, and a masterful look in his eyes. He had the air of a man who might have been an outstanding figure in honorable life, had he chosen, or had fate dictated. He had been thrust forward wearing his hat; this he now removed soberly enough, and I had to admit that his bearing was natural, like that of a strong-willed man conscious of his innocence—or, at any rate, conscious of the impossibility of disproving his innocence.

Just behind him, but keeping outside the door, stood two police officials from headquarters. They observed him closely, but of course, his back being turned to them, they could not watch his features. Inspector Ducastel was doing that, and so was I.

The man was pale, but this again was natural. His big hands clenched and unclenched slowly. Once he moistened his lips with a thick red tongue; but he did not flinch from anything he saw before him in that room of dreadful memories.

Behind him one of the officials spoke, distinctly, solemnly:

"Jules Magnaud, behold her who lies yonder. Do you then know her?"

For the first time Magnaud spoke, in a low but clear voice, which did not tremble. He looked steadily upon his handiwork, and—as if involuntarily—he crossed himself swiftly.

"I do," he answered. "It is Colette Donnay."

"Look closer," the voice at his back commanded. "Her throat has been cut. She is dead—is it not so?"

"So it would appear, *monsieur*," Jules replied, not indifferently, but in a grave, controlled voice.

For a moment silence prevailed. The little canary had ceased its song when Jules entered. The clock upon the mantel ticked softly and a little irregularly. At times it would seem to hurry, and then it would slow down again; but always softly, almost inaudibly. From far away on the brilliant Champs Élysées there stole a

burst of laughter and song intermingled. Then again all was still, until suddenly, back there in the closed kitchen, a dog howled—not loudly, but mournfully, its ululations rising and falling wailingly. Without doubt, one of Ducastel's specialists understood dogs, and could make them speak eloquently!

I beheld a little moisture glitter on Jules's forehead. He wiped it away with his sleeve, but otherwise made no move.

"Why did you do it, Jules?"

The query came as suddenly as the bark of a pistol, from the doorway behind him; but Jules merely shrugged patiently, as if he had to answer a childish question.

"I have many times assured you, *mes-sieurs*, that I know nothing whatever of this deplorable tragedy."

"*Vaurien*, you lie! Dare you look upon the face of your victim, and say before God that your hands are not stained with her blood?"

Jules forced himself to look. I could see that he did not wish to do so, but had long ago steeled himself for the ordeal. To the last remark he made no response whatever.

One of the two men at the door stepped into and across the room, to where the expensive phonograph stood upon a table. He touched the starter and stole back again to his place behind Magnaud.

There sounded from the box a little whirring, a dry rustle, and then—the room was filled with a vital, noble voice, throbbing with religious fervor. It seemed impossible that this magnificently reproduced tone should hold in the hard crust of a disk all the passion and youth and longing of one who had ceased to be aught but dead flesh. The words of the song were solemn and impressive—"I Know That I Shall Rise Again."

For three long verses the song endured. Beside me, as still as a dead man, loomed Ducastel, while his eyes were boring into the face of Jules Magnaud. So, too, were my own. I looked now, if ever, to see the man collapse. My hair was rising on my scalp; what, then, must have been his feelings?

With a sinking heart I realized that even for this he had prepared himself. He made no attempt, now, to wipe the moisture from his face. It ran into his eyes, into the deep grooves leading from chin to lips; but he stood motionless and unbroken.

"Ducastel has failed!" I said to myself. "He cannot break this man!"

The next instant, however, I myself nearly broke. Only by an effort almost superhuman did I check the gasp that strangled in my throat. For, as the voice broke into the final strain—"I shall rise again!"—it seemed to me that I caught a faint stirring on the gilded couch, that a sigh stole from those still, white lips, that the fingers of that trailing hand moved a little way across the polished floor.

Jules, too, had seen it, for he started violently, shrank back, and then recovered himself. Now I was certain! The breast rose and fell; and, like one indeed rising from the dead, or like a somnambulist, Collette Donnay sat erect on her *chaise longue*. Her eyes remained tightly closed, but her head—with that terrible red gash in the neck—it turned sightlessly toward the still echoing phonograph, as if in answer to its triumphant declaration.

Stiffly, little by little, the figure rose. For a moment it stood inert; and then, like a sleepwalker, mechanically, her eyes still closed, but with a sureness that bespoke long familiarity with the room and its furniture, she began to cross the length of it, and so came presently to where, just above her head, the small bird perched listless in its cage. One white arm reached up, the tattered remnants of her silk gown falling back; her fingers sought the little tray and drew it forth; and then—her hand came back, holding a scrap of note paper.

My heart leaping violently, I recognized this for what it must be—the fatal note written by Jules Magnaud, announcing his visit, but sent before his awful purpose had formed.

She turned, faced him, her eyes still tightly shut; and, step by jerky step, inevitably, she approached him, holding out, for him to see, the letter for which he had sought so frantically, and which he had failed to find!

With a strangled scream, more like the cry of a wounded animal than that of a human being, Magnaud leaped back, not daring to take his eyes from her. His back-flung hand was fumbling for the door handle; but the police agent slammed the door shut and rasped the key in its lock. Magnaud was trapped, alone with the woman he had slain, and she was mutely holding out to him the letter he had written her!

Then at last, just before she was within touching distance of him, Jules Magnaud turned and threw himself crashingly against the panels of the door.

"Let me out! Let me go!" he shrieked.

There was no response, and he cried again:

"I confess! *I did it!* See, I will take you to where I buried the knife, in the Bois! Only, for God's sake, let me out!"

The door swung open. Jules Magnaud leaped into the waiting arms of the two police agents. The door closed behind him.

IV

"LAURETTE SOUCY?" Ducastel said some time later, when I stood outside once more, glad of the cold night air on my face. "She was splendid, wasn't she? Yes, she is one of my agents. We have all sorts. Laurette used to be an actress in the Grand Guignol—the little theater where they

specialize on the morbid and the bizarre, you know. She lacks versatility, perhaps; but for special occasions I don't know what I should do without her."

"Must have been a hard experience," I hazarded.

Ducastel shook his head.

"Oh, no! Laurette doesn't mind. I'll introduce you, if you like. You may take her to dinner, and perhaps to a dance to-night."

"Never!" I cried. "I'd rather go to a *bistro* alone, and stand at the zinc bar and drink a cup of their muddy coffee and eat a *croissant*."

"I'm afraid you are not *homme galant*," the inspector chuckled. "Another thing—I have always said that you Anglo-Saxons, and not the Latins, are the real people of sentiment. Well, I have, I trust, justified our methods to you? If so, as you Americans so drolly but so justly say, that is that!"

COMRADES OF THE TRAIL

I HAVE the heart to follow you!

When your clear voice comes back to me,

As you go singing on ahead,

I think of all the lonely roads

I might have known instead.

And when you turn with helping hand,

Where the pathway is rough and steep,

I question not it is the way—

My faith in you is deep.

I have the heart to follow you!

And when the load is heaviest,

I am tiring—it's getting late—

I whisper to my fearful heart,

"You know that he will wait."

Well I know you will not leave me

Until I'm safely on the road;

That you are waiting 'round the turn

To lighten up my load.

The years will bring, as years will do,

A step that's grown both faint and slow,

And I will lay me down awhile

Before alone I go

Along the path, through death's wide gate,

But there I'll wait—I'll wait.

I've had the heart to follow you—

I'll have the heart to wait.

Reata Van Houten

Mr. Ponting's Trousers

THE STORY OF A SLAVE WHO REBELLED, WITH THE MIRACULOUS AID OF AN UNCARING STRANGER

By Homer Croy and Marten Cumberland

"I DON'T think we need to discuss the matter any further," said Mrs. Ponting with the air of finality that has, no doubt, caused many murders.

Leaning back in her chair, she jabbed a pin with deadly accuracy into a piece of sewing material, and then looked at her husband. He was a short, bald-headed little man, who had the air of having been married a long time. In reality, it was only eight years. But, of course, it was Mrs. Ponting who had been his wife all that time.

"After all," continued Mrs. Ponting, "Harry is my brother, and when he comes to Chicago I simply can't allow him to stay at some cheap hotel or at one of those dreadful boarding houses. Besides, his firm is sending him here for only three months and then he will return."

Into Ed Ponting's mild brown eyes there crept a look bordering upon desperation. He eyed the woman of his choice, and then hurriedly looked away again.

For eight years he had been the passive slave of this plump and pink despot; this fleshy woman with the ill-corseted figure, the faded auburn hair, and the three determined chins, each chin apparently growing more determined than its predecessor.

Ed nervously twisted his ragged, straw-colored mustache.

"But, you know, Minnie," he began, "we've only one spare room, and you've said yourself that it's a great convenience to be able to put a friend up for a night or two. Now, if Harry stays with us for three months—"

Mrs. Ponting put down her work, and her cold blue eyes flashed at her little husband like an oxy-acetylene flame.

"Really!" she snapped. "You seem to delight in making difficulties. You know

yourself that the spare room is not used once in a year. Any one would think that you disliked my brother! As a matter of fact, I asked him to come straight here, and he'll arrive in an hour, so there's no more to be said. I can't put Harry off now, and I certainly don't intend to try."

Ed Ponting sank into a chair, and moodily lit a cigarette. His tired-looking eyes looked into a future as bleak as a desert scene in the movies.

For three months he would have to endure Harry—the bluff, lusty, back-slapping, gum-chewing Harry. For three months Ed Ponting's little apartment would be about as quiet and peaceful as a union station.

Three dreary months—over twelve weeks; nearly a hundred days—it would make a revivalist's hell seem like a picnic at White City.

It had happened before, as Ed remembered with a shiver, but then only for a few days. Harry had swept down like the wolf on the fold, worse than any of the cohorts of Assyria; and comparable only in Ed's mind to the last, and the worst, of the plagues of Egypt.

Harry had drunk Ed's precious Scotch, and smoked his tobacco. During breakfast, this human cyclone had read incessantly, and noisily, the least interesting fragments from the newspapers that Ed had badly wanted to read for himself.

Ed's golf clubs had been borrowed, and broken; his books had been borrowed, and lost; even his clothing had been borrowed, and retained.

But these little annoyances were as nothing to the antipathy that Ed had for Harry—who was a magician for making things disappear. Indeed, it was a positive horror that the quiet, bald-headed little man

felt toward his formidable wife's formidable relation.

It would have been bad enough had Harry only borrowed his host's belongings and treated him with contempt; but, in addition, Harry invariably supported his sister in every domestic argument that arose.

As though, thought Ed bitterly, Minnie wanted any support whatever! Except, of course, financial. And Minnie let it be known that she didn't think much of her husband's brand of support, for she was the kind of woman who is constantly talking about what big motor cars the neighbors have.

Ed got to his feet, and ground his cigarette in the ash tray. He moved about the room in a miserable, indecisive sort of fashion while Mrs. Ponting watched him grimly.

"You had better go along to the vaudeville show and get seats," she said. "If you leave it too late, there won't be a decent seat in the house—you know what it is Saturday night. Get a seat for Harry, too; he'll be here by the time you get back."

In silence Ed Ponting put on his hat and coat and went out into the street. So Harry was to come to the music hall with them!

He would come every Saturday for three months, for it was the Pontings' invariable habit to patronize a vaudeville house every Saturday evening. They had done it for years, and Ed rather liked the weekly outing, but with Harry and Minnie, the gilt would be off the gingerbread.

Ed cursed feebly. Why had he not protested more vigorously against this invasion? If it came to that, why had he not put his foot down years ago and asserted his right to many things that Minnie denied him?

He was a poor weak little worm, he supposed, and he had never, somehow, been able to put his foot down about anything. At school, and later at the office, he had always been the butt of fellows who were mostly fools, but who seemed to possess a certain boisterous self-assertion, a confidence and push that Ed Ponting had lacked.

Other men got on all right with their wives. Some of them, although married, behaved with all the verve and dash of bachelors; one would hardly have thought them married at all.

There was Sid Watson, for example. Old Sid went to the same vaudeville house every Saturday night, but he didn't take his wife. Sid was a gay dog, about whom were whispered many rumors, scandalizing to a respectable suburb.

As Ed waited at the box office for his three orchestra seats, he wondered vaguely what it would feel like to be a really gay dog. He was never likely to be one—Minnie would see to that—but to speculate on the subject gave the little man a kind of thrill, a mild, fifteenth cousin, hundred times removed thrill.

He walked back to the apartment, day-dreaming that he had become a regular hell raiser, and that the whole neighborhood was talking in hushed whispers of his infamous exploits.

II

ARRIVING at the little apartment, his dreams were rudely dispelled by a hearty greeting from the newly arrived Harry, who was as welcome to Ponting as a contagious disease.

"Hello! Hello!" cried that worthy, seizing Ed's hand and pumping it up and down. "If it ain't Eddicums! How are you, old sport? So good of you to put me up. Wasn't sure if you could manage it, so I left my suit case at the station cloak room. Get it later on. Minnie tells me we're all going to a show."

Ed looked at the stockily built, red-faced man before him in a dumb misery that he tried hard to dissemble.

"How are you, Harry?" he asked feebly.

Mrs. Ponting's eyes were on her husband, eloquently urging him to enthusiasm.

"It is nice to see Harry again, isn't it, Ed?" she demanded. "Did you get the seats all right?"

The little man nodded.

"Three in the middle of the sixth row."

"That's good," Mrs. Ponting said, with an unusual graciousness in her voice. "Well, we've just time for a snack, and then we must be off. Harry, you must be hungry; you'd better pick up your luggage when we come out of the show. I'll go and get dinner ready while you two men have a nice, long talk."

She bustled out of the room as quietly as a cow climbing a stepladder.

Left alone with his host, Harry proceeded to do the stunt at which he shone—talk.

Walking up and down the room, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, he related details about his affairs, with stories calculated to show his business acumen and his importance in the eyes of his firm.

"So I said to old Crawford—Crawford, you know, is the boss of the whole show—I says, you can't run a modern concern on old-fashioned lines. If our competitors spend a hundred thousand a year in advertising, we've got to spend two hundred thousand, I says. It's not the quality of the goods that counts so much to-day, I says; it's the way they're marketed. Salesmanship is the real art in the modern commercial field. Then I gave him a few figures. My! I can tell you he stared!"

Rattling his money and keys, Harry walked up and down, while Ed looked at him helplessly. Every now and then the little man uttered a word of admiration or assent, but for the most part his comment was hardly required.

The guest indulged in a monologue, while the host, leaning against a bookcase so that the other man could not slap his back, allowed his thoughts to wander.

From this autobiographical romance Ed was rescued by his wife entering the room and beginning to lay the table.

Harry lowered his voice, and his tone changed.

"Ed, old man," he began, "I hate to ask you, old sport, but the fact is the firm sent me here without any money, and I've spent mine on the fare, and so forth. Of course a voucher will be along on Monday or Tuesday. Could you let me have fifteen dollars to tide me over?"

Ed sighed, and produced his pocketbook, which Harry eyed greedily.

"Of course twenty would be an even sum," the visitor suggested.

His host flushed uncomfortably.

"I'm awfully sorry, Harry," he said. "The fact is, I can't spare that much just now, but if ten will see you through I—"

"All right, old sport," Harry agreed. "I'll come again if the firm don't cough up Monday."

The meal proceeded, with Minnie and Harry as happy as Channel swimmers at landing time, while Ed looked like a Christian martyr on hearing the first growl of the lions.

Harry had a lot to say, and said it. Mrs. Ponting had her "social hostess" manner on; that is to say, her voice and words and

facial expression were painfully unnatural. However, Ed found himself entirely ignored, and was glad of the fact.

"My gracious!" Mrs. Ponting exclaimed, pushing away her empty coffee cup and looking through the window. "It's raining cats and dogs."

"So it is," said Harry. "I guess we better order a taxi. Don't you think so, Ed? All right, I'll call one."

When they got to the theater, Harry got out of the taxi, and, holding the umbrella over his sister, escorted her gallantly to the lobby.

"I was going to pay that," he said to Ed, coming back just as the taxi had got fifteen feet away.

Mrs. Ponting always liked to be in plenty of time for the show, and so when they arrived the house was only three-quarters full.

As they took their seats, Ed saw, with pleasure, that his friend Sid Watson was occupying an adjacent seat.

"Hello, Ed!" said that worthy, a little dark man with bright, rather mischievous eyes. "The doorman told me you'd bought seats, so I got one next to yours. How are you, old man? How are you, Mrs. Ponting?"

Ed gripped his friend's hand, while Mrs. Ponting bowed coldly, for the good lady did not approve of Sid Watson, a fact of which she was constantly reminding her husband.

Sid Watson was introduced to Harry, and the two men shook hands.

"My wife's brother," Ed explained. "Coming to stop with us for three months."

"How nice!" Sid said politely. "I say, Ed, come outside for a minute, will you? I've got something I want to show you."

He winked solemnly, while Mrs. Ponting turned a quick suspicious face in their direction.

"Can't you show this thing to him in here, Mr. Watson?" she demanded. "The show is just going to begin. You had better remain in your seat, Ed."

"I won't keep him a minute, Mrs. Ponting," Sid promised.

III

HE led the willing but rather frightened Ed away under the eyes of the scowling Mrs. Ponting. A few seconds later the two men were ensconced in the smoking room.

"What's the idea?" Sid asked, putting his arm through that of the little bald-headed man. "Do you mean to say that red-faced, fishy-eyed sponger is going to live with you for three months? You've had him before, haven't you? Wasn't that enough?"

Ed moodily helped himself to the hip flask that Sid proffered.

"Make it doubles," Sid Watson ordered. "Do you mean to say you'll stand for three months of Harry? Why, I remember what you were like when he came for three days!"

Ed made a helpless gesture with his small white hands.

"What can I do, Sid?" he asked.

"Why, pitch him out on his ear. Let him go to a hotel and pay his way like any one else. He's nothing to you, is he?"

"He's my wife's brother," Ed reminded his friend. "She wants him to come."

Watson made an explosive sound suggestive simultaneously of amazement, indignation, disgust, and contempt.

"What's that to do with it?" he demanded. "You wear the pants, don't you?"

The phrase struck Ponting. He well knew that the family trousers hung on the other side of the closet.

"Er—er—" Ed began.

"Very well," said Watson. "Chuck this sponger out. I tell you, if he once gets a footing, he'll never go. Why, if he stops three months you'll be lucky to see him go in three years. I know the type. Get rid of him now, or God knows when you'll have another chance."

"His firm only sent him here for three months," Ed asserted.

Sid Watson winked.

"Oh, yes! And when he's been three months you'll find the firm wants him to stay indefinitely. I tell you I know the type—chase him."

Ed shook his head sadly.

"He's Minnie's brother," he repeated. "You don't know Minnie, Sid!"

When they returned to their seats the show had started, and a young lady from Massachusetts was singing about her old home in Virginia.

Mrs. Ponting gave her husband a thunderous look, but, fortified by two double servings of the flask, Ed avoided his wife's glance, and gazed steadily at the stage.

Acrobats came and went, and smiled in-

gratiatingly as they stood upside down, or balanced themselves on tables and chairs. Negroes sang about their hot mammies, and a couple of society ballroom dancers flitted up and down the stage. The interval finally came.

Despite Mrs. Ponting's stormy glances, Sid Watson carried off Ed in the interval, this time without any excuse whatever. Harry would have come also, but Watson pointed out that it would be rude for them all to go and leave his sister alone.

Ed wiped his forehead with a trembling hand.

"I think you want to get me into trouble, Sid," he faltered.

"Rot!" returned Watson, whose dark eyes were sparkling. "You ought to get blind to the world occasionally, and throw things about. It would do you good, and your wife, too!"

It was some time after the interval had expired when Sid and Ed returned to their seats.

This time Mrs. Ponting was enraged, and took no pains to conceal her anger. All through the performance she kept on about the way Ed had neglected her and his guest, Harry.

Ed Ponting stared stolidly at the stage. The mild, bald-headed little man had drunk far more than he should have, and a strange exhilaration was stealing over him.

When a comedian asked the audience to join in a chorus, Ed sang heartily, just a fraction of a beat behind his friend Watson.

IV

At last the feature number of the evening was displayed, and with it a gentleman appeared before the curtain and began a long speech.

Most of this address Mr. Ponting missed, owing to an unaccountable buzzing in his head and ears; but he understood that a man called the Great Petrovitch was about to appear, and that he would perform wonders in the way of hypnotic skill, using members of the audience as his mediums.

"A fake!" the wise Harry declared. "I know this guy's game. He plants his assistants in the audience—that's how he does it!"

"The Great Petrovitch," declared the immaculately dressed individual before the curtain, "is bringing to your notice some of the most marvelous feats ever accomplished by the powers of hypnosis and sug-

gestion. All the results that the Great Petrovitch will produce, however marvelous they may seem, are perfectly genuine. M. Petrovitch has no friends or accomplices in the audience, and he has asked me to say that should any member of the audience detect any fraud or trickery in his performance, M. Petrovitch will forfeit the sum of one thousand dollars to any charity that the mayor may care to designate."

"You're wrong, Harry," Ed got up courage to say to his wife's brother's skepticism. "Perfectly genuine act. Goin' be good!"

The Great Petrovitch was really an imposing figure, and, for a foreigner, spoke English with fluency, although he occasionally had trouble with his aspirates. He, too, made a speech concerning what he had done in various foreign capitals, and what he intended to do to-night. To begin with, he would require the assistance of fifteen or twenty members of his audience, and they must be men.

Steps were let down at one side of the stage, and formed a miniature drawbridge across the orchestra. There was a few seconds' hesitation, and then the men began to leave their seats and clamber on to the stage.

There were men of all ages, size, and shape, and most of them looked rather stupidly embarrassed when they found themselves facing the footlights. Attendants showed them to seats placed upon the stage, and then the Great Petrovitch began his act.

And the things he did with those unfortunate volunteers were extraordinary. He had them dancing about the stage like chorus men; he had them chasing imaginary mice; he made one of them eat at his shoe as if it were a delicious food.

The audience howled its appreciation. Certainly the Great Petrovitch was great, and this last turn was easily the best of the lot.

"A fake!" Harry repeated, as though speaking to somebody in the gallery. "It's all bunk."

"You're wrong, Harry," Mr. Ponting demurred grandly. "The power of hypnosis is difficult to exaggerate. Why, I've seen a hypnotist raise a blister on a fellow's hand merely by telling the fellow he had scalded himself."

The Great Petrovitch had finished now with his victims. He restored them to nor-

mal consciousness, and, after a sheepish look about them, they returned to their seats in the auditorium.

The hypnotist advanced to the footlights and held up his hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in a sonorous and impressive tone. "I shall now pass on to the last and possibly the most extraordinary feature of my entertainment. For the purpose of this experiment I shall require the services of a small man. When I have such a medium, you will see, before your eyes, a man of small frame accomplish feats requiring a power and endurance that might well baffle our professional strong men. And these marvelous feats of superhuman strength, ladies and gentlemen, will be accomplished purely by the aid of suggestion and hypnosis. Will some gentleman of small stature kindly step up onto the stage? He need not be afraid; I won't hurt him in any way."

"Go on, Ed, old sport," Harry whispered maliciously. "You ain't very big, or never will be."

Mrs. Ponting laughed, and Ed went very red. His eyes wandered to the steps leading to the stage. Suddenly some unprecedented spirit of adventure urged him to go up and test the powers of the Great Petrovitch.

V

"HERE, Ed! Where are you going?" Watson demanded, but Mr. Ponting had passed rapidly down the aisle, and was climbing, a little unsteadily, up to the stage.

A titter came from the audience as they saw the little bald-headed man wander on the boards and sit down on a chair.

The Great Petrovitch looked at Ed Ponting.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "You will do admirably. Now, will you please tell the audience that you have never seen me before. Are you an accomplice or paid subject of mine?"

Ed shook his head.

"Certainly not," he stated, with dignity.

"Good!" said the Great Petrovitch. "Will you kindly stand up and look me straight in the eyes? Let your mind become a perfect blank. Make no effort to fight against my will; I want you to surrender your whole personality to mine."

Ed stood up, and did exactly as he was told. He looked straight into the man's

eyes, and noted that they were curious, yellowish, smoldering orbs; something like those of a tiger, intense and baleful, the whites flecked with yellow.

"That's right," the hypnotist said softly. "Look straight at me. Look straight into my eyes. Now you feel sleepy—sleepy—"

His voice was soft and caressing, and seemed to come from a great distance.

And then, to the skeptical Harry, there came one of the greatest surprises of his life. He saw his brother-in-law put fairly under the influence of hypnosis, and, in this state, the little bald-headed man did amazing things.

At the command of the Great Petrovitch, Ed's thin arms lifted heavy weights, and his small fingers tore to shreds a pack of playing cards.

Resting his arms and legs on two chairs, with his face uplifted toward the roof, Ed supported the weight of two stage hands and a call boy on his body.

There could be no doubt about the genuine nature of this act, and Sid Watson joined in the enthusiastic applause that followed, while Mrs. Ponting and Harry stared in amazement at the spectacle before them.

"Good Lord!" Harry gasped. "How's it done?"

Mrs. Ponting shook her head helplessly.

At a sign from the hypnotist the stage hands and the call boy arose from Mr. Ponting's chest, and the little man jumped to his feet.

"I will now," said the Great Petrovitch, "pass on to my concluding experiment. I will show you how this little man, by the aid of hypnosis, can support at one time the weight of no less than half a dozen powerfully built men. Ready!"

The orchestra began to play softly thrilling music. Six men filed out from the wings and took their place beside Ed Ponting, who was looking straight and glassy before him.

The hypnotist approached Ed, and made a pass or two before his eyes.

"I will now—" he began, and suddenly coughed queerly and clapped a hand to his throat.

"I will—" he added, and suddenly, in the full sight of the audience, the Great Petrovitch swayed gently, and fell in a swoon to the boards.

Instantly there was a confused babel

from the audience, and some shouting of instructions from the wings. The curtain swung down swiftly, and the manager stepped out in front.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said loudly, "I am afraid that must conclude our performance to-night, as M. Petrovitch is indisposed. It is nothing very serious, but he will be unable to work any more to-night. A doctor has been called. Fortunately, ladies and gentlemen, this is the last act of the show, and M. Petrovitch had practically concluded his entertainment for to-night."

There was some little applause, and slowly, and talking excitedly, the audience began to file out.

"We must stop here for Ed," Mrs. Ponting said angrily. "He would get mixed up with something like this!"

"Well, it's been a great show!" Sid Watson declared. "I wouldn't have missed it for— Hello, here comes Ed now."

VI

ED PONTING was, in fact, coming toward them at a quick pace, having been brought to his normal senses by Petrovitch's assistant, but there was, as Sid Watson noted, a curious look in the little man's eyes, and a certain tenseness in his usually lax figure.

"Yes, here he is," Harry announced, laughing loudly. "The greatest comedian ever! Holy smoke, Ed, you're the funniest thing I ever seen!"

He slapped Ponting on the back, and, quite suddenly, the little man turned on him.

"Damn you, Harry!" Ed Ponting remarked fiercely. "Keep your paws off me, and stop grinning like an ape, or I'll push your fool face in!"

"Ed—" Mrs. Ponting began, in her most dreadful tone, but her husband wheeled ferociously.

"And you, shut up, too!" he commanded. "I've put up with your tongue long enough."

"Look here, old sport," Harry began. "I—"

Ponting's right arm shot out and gripped Harry with a strength that was surprising.

"I'm looking at you," Ponting declared. "And I hate the very sight of you. You think you're going to live with us, but you're not, see? You've got ten dollars from me. Keep it—it will pay for a taxi

to take your baggage to a hotel. Now, beat it."

Harry's red face had gone the color of putty as he rocked helplessly in Ponting's grasp.

"All right, Ed," he stammered. "A-all right."

Mrs. Ponting's face, too, was white, but she made one more effort to assert herself.

"What do you mean, Ed?" she began, but her husband turned on her again, and his usually gentle eyes were blazing with determination.

"Don't you understand?" he gritted. "I'm dangerous, now. The power from that hypnotist chap has passed into me, and, by Heavens, I'm going to use it! If this brother of yours doesn't clear out, I'll throw him out on his ear, and if you interfere with me, Minnie, I'll throw you out, too."

Mrs. Ponting gulped, and grew suddenly submissive.

"All right, dear," she said. "I'm sure Harry won't mind going to a hotel. And now we'll go home."

"You go home," Mr. Ponting ordered. "I'm going along to Sid Watson's club for a game of kelly pool. And don't wait up for me; I'll be late, no doubt!"

A few days later Sid Watson met Ponting in the club, of which Ed had now become a member.

"Hello, Ed," Sid remarked. "How are you? Has that hypnotic stuff worked off yet?"

A soft smile spread over Ponting's face, and he shook his head slowly.

"It's not going to work off again, Sid," he confided. "That's going to last as long as I'm married. I've shown her who wears the pants in this family."

WINDS FROM THE MOON

Winds from the moon
Have come for me.
How can they ever
Tear me free?

How can they loose
My rooted feet?
What shall I tell them
When we meet?

*Harp of my heart,
I won't be long.
Play as I sing
A farewell song!*

Winds from the moon,
Don't go away!
Is it not lovelier
To stay

Here with my silks
And peacock plumes?
Opals are lit
With pale perfumes.

Winds from the moon,
The world's so small,
None of the wisest
Know at all

Whither its whirling
Orbit goes:
I have a purple
Scarf that blows.

*Harp of my heart,
The song is through.
Pity the broken
Strings of you!*

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

A Great Day

WHEN A SOLDIER'S MOTHER FOUND HER LOST SON IN A
PLACE OF HONOR AND GLORY

By A. A. Irvine

THE day had begun well. She hadn't had to take the green bus, not to speak of walking the two miles to the station. Mr. Yates, who owned the big farm at the far end of the village, had sent her a message the night before, telling her that he would be driving into Chalford in the morning, and would be proud to give her a lift; so she had come in a car, like a lady.

It was such a beautiful day, too—better than one usually looked for in the middle of November. Bright sunshine, with just a hint of frost in the air, as if winter were beginning to sharpen up its claws. Not very good for the rheumatics, perhaps; but there—she couldn't put up with folks who were always grumbling, especially when one remembered all the young fellows, some of them without an arm or a leg, who began to feel their wounds again as soon as the cold weather set in. Nice, seasonable weather, she called it—the right kind for the time of year in good old England.

As she stood there, a small, frail-looking figure, waiting for the train, it would not have been difficult to believe that some forty years or so before she had been a very pretty girl. There was still a frequent twinkle in her dark brown eyes, and although the hair under her bonnet was almost white, her lined face had not entirely lost its youthful contours. She had known as much of the sorrows and difficulties of life as most women of her class, yet had kept her heart young in spite of them.

She was looking quite smart, with the Armistice Day poppy pinned on her Sunday jacket. She wasn't wearing black. She hadn't worn black even when Jim, her husband, died. She would have liked to do so, of course. People in the village had thought it rather queer at first, but she had

explained to them that she was only carrying out one of Jim's last wishes.

"When my number's up, I don't want you going about looking like a soot bag, old lady!" he had said.

And Bill had been just like his father—big and cheery and full of life. She hadn't worn black for Bill, either.

Though she was small, and had never been very strong since Bill had come to them, she had always had the spirit of a soldier. That was only natural, for she had always had to do with soldiers. Her father had been one, and Jim had only left the army when they invalided him out with the rank of sergeant after the South African War. As for Bill, he had joined up for the Great War the very day he was old enough.

She liked to think that she was a bit of a fighter herself, and not one of the down-hearted ones—she hadn't any patience with them! She had done her little bit in the war, too—tramping over to the hospital at Chalford in all weathers to scrub floors and help in the kitchen.

And now, though she was all alone, she often said to herself that she had a lot to be thankful for. To begin with, there was the cottage, with a nice little strip of garden in front. Jim had bought that when they settled down. There was the pension, and the eggs and fowls brought in quite a little sum. Then there were the odd jobs up at the big house—Lady Carruthers and Sir John saw to that. She preferred to work for her money, though she knew that, if she had only been ready to agree, Sir John would have liked to make a handsome addition to her pension after Bill saved his son's life at Passchendaele.

That was how Bill had earned the Cross. It sent a warm thrill through her every

time she recalled what Captain Carruthers had told her about it. Bill wouldn't tell her much, and tried to make out that it had all been nothing.

The pair of them had been boys together, and young Carruthers had been one of the officers in Bill's regiment. Young Carruthers had been badly wounded at Passchendaele, and Bill had carried him through a perfect hell of shell fire, struggling along knee-deep in the mud, back to the nearest dressing station. Luckily, Bill hadn't even got a scratch.

Then, only a few weeks later, he and several men of his platoon had just—disappeared, as so many others had done. No one could say what had become of them. Not even so much as an identity disk had been found to suggest what had happened.

Like many another mother, she had gone on for a time, hoping against fear that there might be some news of him. He might have been wounded and taken prisoner. He might be lying in some hospital, shell-shocked, with his memory gone temporarily; but nothing more had been heard of him or his comrades, and at last she had made up her mind to face her loss bravely.

That was some years ago, and lately an idea had been growing in her mind. Since there was no grave for her to visit, she would go to London the next Armistice Day and lay some flowers on the grave of the Unknown Warrior. She would see some of her beloved soldiers again. She might meet some one who had been in Bill's old regiment.

II

SHE glanced at the station clock. The London train wasn't due for a few minutes. She had time to look at the little war memorial on the wall outside the station master's office. She knew the names on it by heart, of course; but she always liked to look at it, just to see Bill's name there. Very neat it was, too—the polished oak frame with the Union Jack at the top, and underneath the inscription:

DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI.

Mr. Farley, the vicar, had explained to her what that meant.

The warning bell rang in the office, and the station master, a burly, rosy-faced man with a gray-flecked beard and mustache, came out.

"You've got a nice day for your jour-

ney, Betty," he greeted her. "I wish I were going with you."

"I wish you were, Mr. Simmonds."

"Next year I must make a point of getting a day off. We'll go up in time for the two minutes' silence."

"Ah, that would be grand! The king, and the soldiers, and all! You see, it's the crowd I'm thinking of, going there alone. My heart's not so strong as it was."

He nodded, and came and stood beside her for a moment, silent, in front of the tablet where his eldest son's name had been inscribed next to Bill's.

"You remember, I went across and saw Jack's grave last year," he reminded her. "Very nicely kept, it was. Some French folks had put flowers on it. One likes to think—" He pulled himself up abruptly, recollecting that there was no place for Betty to visit. "Poor old Bill!" he added.

Betty smiled at him bravely.

"My Bill's all right, Mr. Simmonds! Wherever he is, if he could speak to me, he'd say he was 'in the pink.' He always said that."

"I know. A splendid young chap!"

The train rattled into the station, and her friend put her into a carriage. She was in luck again, with a corner seat to lean back in. Only three other people in the carriage—a stout, good-humored old fellow with the appearance of a well-to-do butcher; a thin, keen-looking man, with one leg up on the opposite seat and a crutch in the rack over his head; and, sitting opposite to her, a pasty-faced youth with a mop of fair hair, an aggressively red necktie, and a cigarette stump dangling loosely from his lips.

Betty waved her hand to Mr. Simmonds as the train moved out of the station, leaned back in her corner, and let herself drift into reverie.

Old memories came flooding in on her—memories as fragrant as the flowers in her tiny garden. She saw Bill first as a curly-headed baby—a strong, chubby mite with, even then, the wide, cheerful grin that he had worn all through his life.

And, later on, Bill as a little boy—a regular young scamp; not an ounce of real harm in him, but forever up to one or other of his tricks. She remembered how, one night, he and Jack Simmonds had gone out after Farmer Yates's apples. The farmer had caught them up the tree, and had thrashed both of them soundly; and

Bill's father had given him a week's confinement to barracks.

Then there was the time when Bill and Jack had disappeared altogether for three days. What a state every one had been in! Notices out, and the police hunting everywhere; and then they had suddenly turned up again—sent back by the military authorities. There had been troops not far off, taking part in autumn maneuvers, and the young rascals had gone off following the camp.

However, Bill's father hadn't punished the boy for that. He had just laughed, and said that it was the right kind of spirit.

After Jim's death, things had been a bit difficult for a time. Bill had grown into a big, sturdy lad, with a growing boy's appetite. However, she had managed all right; and, bless his heart, he had deserved everything that she had been able to do for him. After all, it hadn't been so long before he was a real help to her, earning wages as a carpenter in the railway workshops. All the girls in the village were in love with his strong, handsome face and broad shoulders; but the Great War had started, and he wouldn't give any of them a thought. He was just crazy to be old enough to join up and get to France.

He had got his desire at last, and had gone with the rest of them into the mud and stench and hourly danger of the trenches. She thought of his letters—she had them all at home in a big bundle—always telling her that he was “in the pink,” whatever sort of hell he might be living in.

And then he had come home on leave—after Passchendaele, that was. She had met him at Victoria—a great, stalwart figure in khaki, soiled with the mud of the trenches. How proud she had been to take him back with her to the village!

During his leave there had been their trip to London, when the king had pinned the Cross on him at Buckingham Palace. She would never forget that day!

Afterward they had had the most wonderful dinner, at some place which she had insisted was much too grand and expensive; but Bill wouldn't hear of anything else. He had laughed and said that they were out for a holiday, and that nothing was too good for his old sweetheart; and they had finished up with an evening at the pictures.

A few days later he had gone back again. He had been one of a mass of cheery khaki-clad men hanging out of the carriage windows and cracking their jokes—the plucky jests of men returning from paradise to hell. She had waved her hand to him from the platform, one of a group of women equally brave, striving to hold back the blinding tears till the last carriage had passed away down the line.

There was one last scene. She dared not dwell on it for long—the grave-faced postman rapping on the cottage door, handing her the telegram from the War Office. The words of the message had been burned into her brain:

Regret to inform—missing, believed killed—

And then, just as her world seemed to have turned upside down forever, had come that gracious letter of sympathy from the king himself, which had given her the strength to carry on.

III

“I DON'T 'old with wars!”

The excited, high-pitched voice of the young man sitting opposite to her roused her from her meditations. Her three companions were discussing the Day and what it stood for.

The stout humorist in the far corner of the carriage chuckled good-naturedly before he spoke.

“You don't, eh?” he said, with a wink at Betty. “Well, you don't like the measles or the whooping cough, but you can't stop people having them—that's the trouble.”

“But we *can* stop wars,” the young socialist asseverated vehemently. “And, what's more, we're going to! When we 'ave government for the people by the people, there'll be an end of war! Ah, and an end of slave driving capitalists and the idle rich and the so-called nobility and royalty! I don't 'old with kings,” he announced, looking round the carriage for support.

The ex-soldier drew his injured leg down from the seat and turned truculently toward him.

“Don't you go saying anything against King George!” he ordered sharply. “Otherwise, you and me—”

“I wasn't speaking of any particular king,” the young socialist sulkily returned; “only of kings in general. It's the system—

the rotten system; but when the great voiceless mass of the proletariat—"

"They ain't all voiceless, worse luck!" interjected the ex-soldier with a dry laugh, as he cocked his leg up on the seat again, and began to stuff his pipe.

The orator passed his tongue over his lips.

"I put it to you, comrades—"

"You needn't go calling me your comrade, my lad. Comrades of the Great War I understand, but not the kind you're talking about. It's—it's dirtying the word!"

"They forgot to send 'im 'is invite to Buckin'ham Palace," the stout man declared. "Now, my theory about these wars is that it's just the polerticians. Mind you, I'm not saying that they mean any arm; it's just that they don't know."

"And they've got to keep theirselves in the limelight," put in the ex-soldier. "Otherwise, they'd 'ave no more chance at the next election than—than a flea in 'Yde Park!"

"You've 'it it! 'Charlie,' says one of them, 'if I support your bill for more Pullmans on the Timbuctoo Railway, will you do the same for me about supplying free ice cream to the pore Icelanders?' 'Right you are, George!' says Charlie. Well, the Timbuctoolians don't want Pullmans, and the Icelanders would 'ate to 'ave any more ice; so next week there's another ruddy war—and we're in it!"

The youth with the red tie braced himself for further argument.

"The kings are worse even than the polerticians—" he began; but Betty intervened.

"You were out there—in the war?" she asked the ex-soldier.

He nodded.

"Less than a year," he answered regretfully. "Bit of shrapnel through my leg when we took Hill 60. Eight months in hospital. I wasn't much use after that."

"Ah! I had a son in France." Betty's voice was full of pride. "They gave him the Victoria Cross; and after—after I'd lost him, I had a letter from the king!"

The young man opposite stared at her incredulously.

"You 'ad a letter from the king?"

"I did! You see, it was less than a month since Bill had been given the Cross. I had a letter signed by the king with his own hand. He's a busy man, they say, but he had time to think of me."

Even the youthful socialist became interested as Betty began to tell them about Bill. With her eager face alight, and a flush on her worn cheeks, she told them how Bill and his officer had served a machine gun through the whole of one long, hideous night in a shell hole, the dead of their platoon lying around them; and how, in the gray, drizzling dawn, Bill had struggled back carrying his wounded officer through the crashing hell of an enemy barrage. She told them of his last leave with her, of the coming of the telegram, and of her treasured letter.

"There may be a chance yet, missus," the ex-soldier commented sympathetically. "There 'ave been cases, you know—men with shell shock—men who've come back all right."

Betty shook her head.

"It's too long ago for that," she said, wiping the moisture from her eyes. Her indomitable spirit rose in her again. "There must be hundreds like me! Well, he had a happy young life and a fine death. My Bill wouldn't like me to grumble."

As she finished speaking, the train rolled into London Bridge Station, and amid the bustle on the platform her eye caught sight of a familiar figure.

"Why, there's Captain Carruthers!" she exclaimed. "Him I was telling you about—"

A tall, dark-haired young man standing close to the carriage turned on hearing his name spoken. When he saw who it was, he came forward, limping slightly, a smile on his face, and shook hands with her through the window.

"Good morning, Betty," he said. "It's luck, meeting you! You've got a nice, fine day."

"Yes, isn't it, sir? I'm going—"

"Oh, I know all about that. My mother mentioned it in one of her letters. You must tell me about it afterwards."

"To be sure I will, sir!"

"Well, I shall be going home for the week-end. How about giving me tea at your cottage on Sunday afternoon? Got any of that damson jam left? Don't tell me that you've come to the end of your damson jam!"

Betty beamed at him.

"There's plenty of it left, sir."

"Thank Heavens! Then that's all right!" He heaved a sigh of relief. "Sunday afternoon—don't forget!"

He shook her hand again, and raised his hat as the train started.

"Him and my Bill were like brothers," she explained to her fellow travelers. "Wherever they were, it was always his men that he thought of first. Bill used to say so."

The ex-soldier nodded comprehendingly.

"They were nearly all of them like that. There wasn't much wrong with the old class of gentry. It's these blarsted profiteers who're spoiling things!"

When the train drew up at Charing Cross platform, there was a general move to open the door for her; but it was the young socialist who got out first and helped her to alight. Strange to say, he took off his cap when he said good-by to her.

"I must 'ave another think over this king business," he assured her, rather shamefacedly.

Betty regarded him severely.

"It won't do you any harm, young man!" she answered. Then her face softened. Perhaps she had been too hard on him. After all, he was very young. On a sudden impulse she put a hand on his shoulder and kissed his cheek. "You must be just the age my Bill was," she said in explanation, and left him standing looking after her.

IV

OUTSIDE the station she took a bus for Whitehall, and got out close to the Cenotaph. She had never seen it before, and it was the first object of her quest.

The morning crowds had thinned, but around the memorial there were still many people, grave faced and silent. A faint breeze fluttered the three flags affixed to either side of it, and about its base was a carpet of petals blown from the many wreaths and masses of banked up flowers.

From where she stood Betty could see the great wreath of poppies which the king had laid there in the morning; and she could read the simple inscription on the memorial:

THE GLORIOUS DEAD

She was glad there was nothing more.

She watched the passers-by raising their hats, and a knot of soldiers in khaki saluting; and somehow it seemed to her that Bill was very near. If he had suddenly spoken to her she would scarcely have felt

any surprise. It was a fine thought—on this great day it was her Bill whom all these people were honoring, along with the others who had fallen.

She passed on a little farther, and found a tea shop not far from Westminster Abbey. While she had her meal, she was listening to the people talking around her. They were speaking of the king standing bareheaded at the foot of the Cenotaph, mourning with his people the men who had given their lives for home and country; of the distant boom of the gun which broke the great silence; of the trumpets sounding the "Last Post," and the solemn music of the massed bands.

A woman was telling her friends about the service in the Abbey, and how, after the singing of the national anthem, there had come from afar the sharp notes of the bugles signaling the reveille. It had seemed to her, she said, like a call to the mighty dead to rise again!

Betty thrilled to it all. Next year she would come early, under Mr. Simmonds's escort, and pay her homage with the rest.

Her meal over, she went in search of her flowers. It was such a grand-looking shop that she was almost afraid to enter it; but when she came out again her face was wreathed with smiles. The two girls in the shop had been so kind! She had told them what she wanted the flowers for, and they had helped her to make her choice. What a wonderful bunch they had given her for her shilling! She had always heard that in London flowers cost a terrible lot of money. Well, it certainly didn't look like it.

Shepherded by a friendly policeman, she made the crossing to the Abbey, and stood at length under the vast expanse of Gothic roof which through the centuries has rung time and again with strains of thanksgiving for victory and of lament for England's sons fallen gloriously upon the field of battle. The names meant nothing to her—Agincourt, the Armada, Waterloo; nor the names of the great kings and statesmen whose monuments surrounded her on every side. Her thoughts were fixed on that plain black marble slab with the gold lettering upon it, set in the stone-flagged flooring of the nave.

She had read the account of how, one Armistice Day, in the presence of the highest in the land, there had been buried there the body of a soldier, "unknown by name

or rank," brought from a French cemetery. With pomp befitting a warrior they had brought him, still shrouded with the friendly soil of France, to his last resting place. It was wonderful to think that beneath that plain black stone there lay some woman's son!

She sat for awhile watching the people pass. Few of them lingered. For the most part they passed silently by, a far-away look in their eyes, dropping their poppies on the grave, which glowed red with them in the failing light of the afternoon sun. It seemed as if, after this act of homage, they dared not trust themselves to stay.

With a catch at her heart Betty noticed that one of them, a soldier, was very like her Bill, but older. Bill was very close to her, she knew; thinking of her, perhaps trying to speak to her. She saw him so often in her dreams!

There was a lull at last, and she rose from her seat and moved closer. For a moment or two she stood beneath "the padre's flag"—the Union Jack dyed with the blood of fighting men whose burial pall it had been after Hill 60, after Vimy Ridge, after the bitter conflict on the Somme. How many a khaki-covered form had it covered at dead of night, in the chill hours of a gray dawn? Behind her, fastened in its case to an age-old pillar, was the Congressional Medal of Honor—America's tribute to the British dead.

She went slowly forward and knelt at the foot of the grave—a lonely figure in that most sacred shrine of England. She could read part of the inscription on the stone:

THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS, BECAUSE
HE HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND
TOWARD HIS HOUSE

She unpinning the poppy from her jacket, and laid it with her bunch of flowers upon the tomb. Her head was bowed, and her lips were moving in silent prayer.

And then, as she raised her eyes again, her heart seemed to stop beating. Breathless with wonder, she was gazing at a tall figure standing at the head of the grave, who was smiling down at her. He was smiling just as Bill had smiled at her that last time.

It couldn't be! It wasn't possible! Ah, but she couldn't doubt it! It *was* Bill! It was her son, returned to her from the dead!

But—but why was he dressed like that—in full equipment, his clothes soiled by the mud of the trenches, just as she had seen him that last time at Victoria? It was her son, but there was something strange about him—something she couldn't understand.

As with an inarticulate cry of love she stretched out her arms to him, he was gone. She knelt, for an instant crushed by the bitter agony of her loss.

And then, like a blinding flash of glory, the knowledge came to her. It was her son who was buried there! Her son was the Unknown Warrior! It was her Bill whom all England honored in that memorial, who had been laid to rest among the most illustrious in the land—"unknown by name or rank," except to her!

It would be her secret—her very own, not to be shared with any one in the world; her great joy for the remainder of her life! The amazing glory of it! Never again, so long as she should live, would she feel pain or sorrow or poverty—never any more! Nothing but joy and gratitude to God for the marvelous gift that He had given her. In this great Temple raised to His worship she had found her son again!

After awhile she rose to her feet, her face radiant. Though she could scarcely bear to drag herself away, it was getting late, and she ought to be starting homeward. She would come again—very soon. Though her heart was filled with ecstasy and pride, she was tired, too. The knowledge that had come had overwhelmed her; but she would soon be herself again. She would rest for a few minutes.

In a recess behind a pillar, where she could keep her eyes fixed on the poppy-covered grave, she found a chair. She sat down, and once more allowed the full rapture of her wonderful secret to flood over her.

How drowsy she felt! She mustn't miss her train—

Still, a nod or two wouldn't matter.

V

THE tall lady in black, with snow-white hair, called to her daughter, who was lingering by the tomb.

"Margaret, come here for a moment."

The younger lady joined her, and they stood together looking at the peaceful old figure in the chair.

"Oh, mother, did you ever see a more perfectly happy face?"

"Isn't it beautiful? I wonder who she is. She looks like an old countrywoman." The elder lady sighed. "She, too, may have lost a son. Perhaps she's dreaming of him. Poor dear! How terrible for her when she wakes!"

"But we ought to wake her, mother," the younger lady said. "It's growing cold, and she's not too warmly clad."

She leaned forward and touched Betty

tenderly on the shoulder, dreading to see that expression of tranquil, absolute happiness fade from the sleeper's face when she returned to consciousness of the living world about her.

"Come, my dear," she urged gently. "It's too cold for you to sit here any longer—"

She stopped speaking suddenly, as realization came to her; for the look of radiant happiness did not pass from Betty's face. She did not wake.

A Screen Idyl

IN THAT WORLD OF ILLUSION—THE MOVIES—ONE FIRST-CLASS FIGHTING MAN WINS HIS ACCOLADE AND ANOTHER GAINS WISDOM

By Claude S. Watts

IT was noon on the big movie lot out on Long Island. Jerry North, with an important delivery to make that required the personal receipt of the property man, was in search of that elusive individual. He went edging his way through the milling crowds of queer-looking, queer-acting people, and wondering if an insane asylum could be a crazier place than this.

Jerry was in no mood to enjoy the colorful scene. He had lost his girl. He had lost his big chance to be manager of the North Express Company, and was back driving a truck, along with the rest of the rough-necks, as his father had put it. Besides, he hated movies and movie people.

Khaki clad, six feet in height, and of proportionate poundage, with an otherwise handsome face distinguished by a sadly battered and dented nose, Jerry North might well have belonged in the motley mob through which he was making his way, but he was not aware of that fact. Suddenly, however, he realized that he was the object of unusual attention.

A dapper little half portion of a man, in riding breeches and boots and an immaculate white silk shirt, and crowned with a disreputable old cap, worn with the droop-

ing visor in reverse, was dancing excitedly about him, first on one side and then on the other, and uttering strange, low cries.

"Be yourself!" Jerry said, with a sweep of the arm that sent the pest staggering.

"Don't do that!" the little man commanded, bouncing back like a rubber ball. "I want to talk to you. Come with me."

With that he stepped briskly off, while Jerry hesitated.

"Better go along," some one from the crowd advised. "He's the works."

"I don't care if he's the whistle on the works," Jerry declared, but nevertheless he followed, and presently found himself in a sumptuously furnished office.

"I'm Gordon," the little man explained. "Sit down."

"I'm Coolidge, and I'll take the bad news standing up," Jerry retorted.

But he sat down. There was something compelling about the half portion.

"How would you like to go into the movies?" he demanded.

"How'd I— Say, I'm a poor but honest truck driver—and don't kid me!"

"I'm not joking. I haven't time for that. You're the man I've been looking for for months. But your nose—"

"Say, bo!" Jerry bridled. "You better lay off my nose. You're little, and I can't hit you, but I'll take you between my thumb and finger and squash you!"

"Don't be absurd. Listen to me."

Jerry listened. Out of a spray of words that might have been shot at him from a machine gun, he gathered that, except for his nose, which could be fixed—plastic surgery, you know, and perfectly simple—he looked enough like some one to be his twin.

"And that's what I've got to have—twins. This picture I want to make calls for twins, and the big scene is a smashing, hell of a fight between the brothers. My star can do a dual rôle, of course, but he can't fight himself. I want you for the fight. I'll pay you a hundred a week for six months and take care of the surgeon's bill. What say?"

Jerry shook his head. "I can't act, and I know it. And after six months I'd be out of a job and with a lot of fool notions in my head so that I'd never be worth a damn—"

"Make it a year's contract at one hundred and fifty. It's a holdup, but I've simply got to have you. You're the only man I've ever seen who looks enough like King Lawler."

King Lawler! Jerry's heart gave a great leap. He was to have a chance to fight King Lawler, and to be paid real money for it! He would be glad to do it for his coffee and cakes and cut out the cakes! But he must not seem too eager.

"All you want me to do is this fight?"

"That's all. Of course you're to be on hand if we should need you for anything else; but the fight's the big thing."

"Is it to be a real fight?"

"Just as real as it can be made."

"Well," Jerry still dissembled, "I don't know that I want to hurt anybody, or get hurt, for that matter, but it's important money you're offering, and I guess you've hired a hand."

"Report to me just as soon as Dr. Dawes is through with you," said Gordon, after the contract had been signed and a letter written to the surgeon. "But I don't need to tell you that, for if you read your contract you'll find that although your salary begins to-day, you don't get any of it until you show up for work. That's just to make sure you don't run out on me."

The director smiled with the satisfaction of one who has put something over on the unwary, but Jerry matched him smile for smile.

"I'll sure not run out on you," he said. "I think I'm going to like this job."

II

STRAIGHTENING Jerry's nose and remolding it after the Lawler pattern was a matter of skill, patience, and pain, but Dr. Dawes had skill and patience, and Jerry could endure the pain. He would do anything to get a chance at Lawler.

And could Jerry North fight? Fighting was his dish! Hadn't he lost his girl and queered himself with his old man because he was a natural-born battler?

Edith Murray—dainty, delectable, blue-eyed, black-haired Ede—had been his girl. Not that she had ever admitted it to him, nor that he had ever asserted it to her. It was just one of those well-established facts, established as such facts are established on the lower west side, by repeated demonstrations, that Jerry packed a punch in his right and a hook in his left that had a little something on any anæsthetic ever compounded by a chemist.

Edith, true to her sex, both gloried in those demonstrations and resented them, had Jerry only known it. The primitive in her quickened to the fighting, domineering male who would permit no poaching on his preserves, while the neoteric in her burned fitfully, if not blazingly, with the desire for self-determination.

She yearned to be claimed and made way with, and at the same time she rebelled against fate and insisted upon doing a bit of the choosing herself. She had a right to have other admirers, if she wanted them.

Besides, Jerry was afraid of her. That was amazing, but true. He would fight any man who came near to her, but was afraid to come close to her himself—that is, not close enough! Ultimately she expected to marry him, ugly nose and all, and he would be all right as a husband because she knew how to handle him.

But that was in the future, and in the immediate present she wanted a lover rather than a husband, and as a lover Jerry was certainly a flat tire. Why, he never even tried to kiss her, and if it weren't for dancing and the movies she would never know that a man ever put his arm around a girl!

Jerry, in one way or another, had told everybody in their world that she was his girl, and he never could understand why he couldn't assert himself with her and to her. Of course the reason was that he was afraid. He was not afraid of her, as she thought, but he was afraid that she would turn him down.

He couldn't believe that a bewilderingly beautiful creature like Ede would fall for a rough, broken-nosed fighting fool like himself. It didn't stand to reason.

Make love to her? Grab her? Kiss her? Tell her it's a wedding march she hears, and to step lively? Say, how do you get that way?

You can dream that line, but you never wake up and find yourself trying it. Not with Ede! Not by no means! She's different from other girls—superior—refined. She might carry a powder puff and a lipstick, but no petting permits.

A fellow that tried to get fresh with her would find himself dropped off the earth without a parachute. Does she ever expect to get married? Say, how do guys like us know what a girl like her expects to do? Anyhow, she's crazy about the movies, and always raving about King Lawler. Maybe that means something.

So it had been that evening when, as they left the Tivoli, Ede had insisted on talking about the star in the picture they had just viewed, and Jerry had wanted to talk about something else. Ede had said she wasn't interested in what he wanted to talk about.

"Well, sa-a-a-y!" he protested. "Maybe you think I'm crazy to hear you rave about this Lawler bird! Sign off on that stuff! Every time you see him in a close-up you imagine you're the dame he's going to do the clinch with in the next scene, and then you get on the air with a line that would go for a bedtime story in an old ladies' home. Sign off!"

"You're just jealous of his good looks!"

"Boloney!"

"You are, so! You know he's the best looking man on the screen, and why won't you admit it?"

"I'll admit everything you say about him. Add it all up and what have you? A cross between a drug store cowboy and a lounge lizard. A he-doll!"

"Huh! He's a he-man, if you ask me. Look at that fight in the picture to-night. Didn't he knock out three men?"

"Sure! Does the leading man ever lose a battle in a movie? He gets his money for winning, and the guys fighting him get theirs for doing a flop. See? They don't lay a hand on him—the director wouldn't let 'em for fear they'd spoil Lawler's pretty face. I'd like to get him in a real fight. I'd make him hard to patch up!"

"That's you, all over! Always talking about fighting, and always wanting to beat somebody up."

"Sa-a-a-y! Who started this fight talk? Lay off me, Ede! What do you expect me to do when you keep raving about King Lawler all the time?"

The way of a maid with a man is past finding out, as has been observed and recorded long since. Wherefore, there was a change of tactics. A slender form swayed against Jerry. A firm little hand clasped his arm.

A low, throaty laugh, delicious, provocative, thrilled him through and through. Teasing, provocative words were murmured. But just when Jerry might have accepted the gauge—might, in the blessed shadows of the side street, have whirled her around and into his arms, and have dared much—might, indeed, have put his fortunes to the test—there had been another change of tactics. Ede had dropped her hand from his arm and told him about Ed Winter, her father's new foreman.

"Dad brought him home this evening, and I met him. He's awfully nice. He's taking me to a movie to-morrow night." That was sheer fabrication, just to see what the effect would be, but poor Jerry couldn't know that.

"Stepping out with him already, huh?"

"He's awfully good-looking."

"Class as well as speed, huh?"

"Almost as good-looking as King Lawler."

Small wonder, then, Jerry North had gone forth seeking a man named Ed Winter, had found him in a place known as The Wop's, and had staged another of those hostile demonstrations, complete and convincing, but with results he had not anticipated. It led his father to say:

"You're back driving a truck if you're still working here. I thought you were getting over your foolishness and ready to settle down, but it seems that you're not. If you're hell bent on being a rough-neck, you can work with the rough-necks, or not at all."

And Ede had announced:

"All you can do is fight, fight, fight, and I'm sick and tired of it. Good-by!"

III

JERRY'S first meeting with King Lawler was in Gordon's office, when he reported for work, and, incidentally, "for that bit of money that's coming to me." His introduction, if it could be termed such, contained no salve for Jerry's feelings.

"Here's that man I've been telling you about," the director said. "What do you think of him?"

Lawler inspected his twin-to-be as critically as if he were acquiring an Airedale for show purposes.

"Maybe he'll do"—he pronounced the verdict doubtfully—"with make-up, and a lot of coaching, and a few other things."

"Ha!" Jerry said to himself. "He's jealous because I've got the same good looks that he has."

"For one thing," the star continued, "get him to a good barber and have his hair cut right. No shaving the neck, you know, and no clippers; trimmed, you know, without a stubble-field effect. His hair has a tendency to wave a little, like mine. Give it a chance. As to his acting, Grimes will take him in hand for the coaching, I assume, and he can do a lot with him."

The manner and tone of this pronouncement made Jerry's blood riot, and he was ready for the fight at that moment, but he was forestalled by Lawler's next move.

"Well, brother," he said, holding out his hand to Jerry, with a friendly grin, "I hope we're going to enjoy working together."

Confused and embarrassed, Jerry could only extend a limp hand, and mutter something unintelligible.

"Are you a good scrapper?" Lawler went on. "I mean the rough and tumble kind, where you do a bit of wrecking and all that?"

"That's my favorite fruit!" Jerry could respond honestly to that, and he did so, forcefully, adding, by way of a clincher: "A few days before I met the boss here I knocked out three guys in that kind of a scrap, and made a gin shop look like it had been hit by a cyclone. It took five of the finest to put me in a cell, too."

"Drinking, eh?" Again there was a tone of doubt in the star's voice.

"No—grudge."

"Ah, that's better!" The movie hero

laughed heartily. "When we come to our big scene we'll have you imagine you've got a grudge against me."

"I've got a good imaginer, too."

Lawler laughed again. "Fine! I'm sure you're going to do. Well, I must get back to work. See you later. No, wait a moment. Come along with me. Instead of sending you to a barber we'll have my valet do your hair. He does mine, and in three or four weeks he can get yours looking right. Also, he can help you with the dope about my clothes, and how I wear 'em, and so on—little personal tricks that you'll have to pick up."

So Jerry's induction into the movies was at the hands of, as he expressed it, "a damned he-maid, who looked like something that shouldn't be allowed, but who certainly knew his scissors and comb!"

Meeting with King Lawler, and embarking upon his new career was one thing, but seeing Edith Murray was something else again. To call, or not to call, that was the question. Jerry did not know what to do.

Happily his feet did, and they led him to the Murray domicile as directly as if he were a homing pigeon or a hiving bee.

"Oh, so you're out again!" was the cool greeting accorded him. "I thought they had sent you up the river for life." Then she got a good look at him. "Why, Jerry North, you've been fighting again, and somebody's hit you in the back of the head hard enough to straighten your nose. Some wallop!"

"Aw, Ede! Lay off me!" But Jerry was happy; it was great to be kidded by Ede! "How d'you like the new beezer?" turning his head this way and that for inspection. "Ain't it a beaut?"

"Wonderful! You don't look like yourself at all. I know! You look like King Lawler!"

"You got it the first guess." Jerry was laconic. "That's my new job."

A puzzled young lady wrinkled her brow. "I don't get that. What's your new job?"

"Looking like King Lawler."

"What for?"

"One fifty a week with a year's contract." This caused more wrinkling of the girl's brow. "Got you guessing, ain't I? Well, try this on your music box: I'm in the movies, doing a picture in which I and King Lawler are supposed to be twins."

"Jerry North—you're not!"

"Surest thing you know."

"Oooooo-eeeeee!"

After that excited shriek, a much surprised young man found himself grabbed by two firm little hands and shaken violently. "Jerry! Jer-ree! I could kiss you if that's really true!"

Jerry offered proof, giving her every happening from the memorable day the great Gordon had tagged him down, up to and including details of his eventful first day at the studio.

Edith listened with rapt attention, her eyes shining, and punctuated his tale with squeally exclamations of "Wonderful! Isn't it perfectly grand!" and, at the end, "Oh, Jerry, it's just too too-too! I'm so excited I don't know what to do!"

Then a sobering thought occurred to her. "What does your father say about it?"

"I'd hate to tell you all that he said, but he wound up with, 'Get the hell out of here, and don't come back till you've had some sense pounded into you!'" Jerry chuckled. "I guess he won't think I'm so dumb after awhile."

That gave them both a good laugh. Then Jerry repeated his tale to this girl who was "just thrilled to death!" and it did not lack for embroidery in the re-telling. To instance a touch:

"Grimes, that's the assistant director who's to do nothing but direct me now, says I'm sure to make good." What Grimes actually said was: "If you've got anything above your ears except hair, you'll make good, with me coaching you."

And another embellishment:

"I guess I'm the man they needed, all right, Ede. I met a bunch of the actorines this afternoon, and all of them said I was a perfect double for Lawler. One of them"—a deprecatory cough—"said I was the image of Lawler, only better looking."

Why should he tell Ede what Grimes had actually said, which was: "Those dames are hopeless apple sauce addicts, and if you go falling for their line I won't be able to do a thing with you."

As Jerry told himself, "Ede is simply eating it up, and why not give her a good feed?"

Then, at last he demanded:

"You believe it's all true, now, don't you, Ede?"

"Oh, yes! And I'm so happy! I'm just tickled pink!"

"Well"—it was a new Jerry North speaking in a tone Edith Murray had never

heard before—"you know what you said you'd do if it was true."

"Oh, Jerry! You wouldn't make me—make me kiss you—first!"

IV

THE ensuing days that rounded so rapidly into weeks were exceedingly busy ones. They were hard days, too, for Jerry had to learn that play acting is not play; that merely to look like King Lawler would not get him by; he had to be like him, and that state entailed long hours of grueling work under the lashing, sarcastic tongue of Grimes, whom nothing satisfied.

He found, also, that he was expected to go through a course of gymnasium work as if he had been in training for a prize fight. He rebelled against that, but Grimes drove him to it relentlessly.

"You're supposed to do a fight scene, aren't you?" the director demanded. "How are you going to fight if you're not in condition? You think you're good. All right, get better! You'll need all you've got and then some when Lawler goes after you. And don't forget we want a real fight."

However, for all the demands made upon his time, Jerry managed to be with Edith frequently in his newly acquired status as an accepted sweetheart. At first he was deliriously happy, and then—enter the serpent and exit bliss!

Ede surely was crazy about him. At any rate, she acted as if she was, and that suited him from the ground up. She never raved about King Lawler any more. She raved about Jerry.

But—she raved about him, because he grew to be more and more like King Lawler every day! A little of that went a long way, and a little more was too much.

"Aw, Ede, forget that Lawler stuff!" he protested on one occasion. "I'm Jerry North, and I look like Jerry North, and act like Jerry North."

"But, Jerry, you do look like King Lawler."

"Not any more'n he looks like me, and—" He choked off what he had been about to say.

"And what?"

"Aw, nothing, except that I wish you could like me because I'm me."

"Oh, but I do!"

But what Jerry really had been about to add was something to the effect that after their big fight Lawler wouldn't look like

him any more than a Hamburg steak resembles a porterhouse, and he had refrained solely because to say it would be to spoil his big surprise for Ede.

He had already demonstrated that he was just as good-looking as King Lawler; now, in the big fight, he would prove to her that he was a better man than King Lawler ever dared to be.

And Jerry had no doubt about his ability to do that. His only concern was that it would not be a real fight; that he would be instructed to "do a flop," and let Lawler appear to win, as he always did on the screen. In that event, Jerry promised himself grimly, he would make it a real fight long enough to show Lawler up, and then they could go to hell with their picture!

However, he had Gordon's and Grimes's assurances that the fight was to be the genuine article, and Lawler had once casually explained that although the fight scene was not the final scene in the picture, it would be filmed last, in order that "when we both go to the hospital for repairs, there'll be no delay and no harm done." Later Jerry decided to feel out the star.

"This scrap of ours," he said. "Somebody's going to get hurt—maybe bad."

"Not finking it, are you?" Lawler's query was sharp and quick.

"Certainly not! I was just thinking we could make it look real enough without trying to murder each other, and I don't see why, in your position, you'd take a chance."

"You can't fool the camera, Jerry, and as for taking a chance, that's all in the game. I wouldn't be where I am to-day if I hadn't taken chances—plenty of 'em. I believe in always putting everything I've got into what I'm doing. No, we'll give them the real goods. It was decent of you, though, to think of me"—Jerry winced at that—"but if I come out with any scars I'll try to find some way to turn them into assets. Remember, too, that you may make a reputation out of this picture that will do you a lot of good, and go after me as if you had to murder me. If I can't take care of myself I'll be out of luck, that's all."

That settled it—the fight would be on the level—but it was unsettling in another respect. There was that suggestion that Jerry North might make a reputation for himself in this picture that would do him a lot of good.

How could he do that if he spoiled the picture by smashing Lawler to bits in the fight scene? And Ede seemed dead set on his becoming a great movie star, and maybe that wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

He knew he had it in him. Jerry had been in movieland long enough to become infected with the virus of star dust.

And, another thing, Ede seemed kind of crazy about his good looks. Suppose he got his nice new nose smashed in the fight? It was likely that he would, since he had always taken a tap or two on the beak every time he had mixed it with anybody.

The surgeon had warned him his nose couldn't be repaired if he got it smashed again. He couldn't become a great movie star with his nose spread all over his map; the best he could hope for would be character rôles. And Ede wouldn't rave over him then. She'd probably give him the air again.

And suppose he did smash Lawler beyond repair? What would he get out of that? Not much. Less than half of that! After all, Lawler hadn't done anything to him except treat him decently and act like a regular guy, and Lawler stood to lose a lot if anything serious happened to him. Aw, shucks! Jerry wished he was out of the whole mess.

But he knew only too well that he could not get out of it. He had to see it through. He racked and racked his poor brain, and that was the only answer. Unfortunately all this brain racking did not tend to put him in better condition to see it through.

V

THE climactic day came, and at ten o'clock, the hour appointed for the filming of the big scene, the studio was relatively as crowded as any of the arenas where heavyweight boxing championships have been staged. There was not a foot of available space, nor a single vantage point from which the fight might be viewed, that was not occupied.

All moviedom had heard of King Lawler's new picture, and was there to witness the shooting of the great scene that was to feature it. Edith Murray was there—Jerry had seen to it that she should be present in his hour of triumph. And over all the great Gordon lorded it, swaggered and strutted; it was to be his hour of triumph, too.

Little time was wasted in preliminaries after Lawler and Jerry appeared. Then the signal came to begin the fight—and Jerry funked it!

There is no other word for it. He funked it completely, miserably, pitifully, shamefully. He tried, Heaven knows he tried, but there was no more fight in him than there is in a rubber doll, and he could not even get started.

Every time Gordon gave them the word, "Wade in!" Jerry ventured forth like a maiden lady afraid of getting her feet damp, and with a vacuous grin on his face that necessitated starting all over again.

"Register hate!" Gordon shrieked. "You're not going to kiss him—you're going to kill him! Now, try it again. Oh, my God! I tell you this isn't a petting party—it's a murder!"

Gordon raved, ranted, tore his hair, and swore in every language he knew, including the Scandinavian. He threw his cap on the floor and jumped up and down on it. He begged, abjured, and wept—all to no avail.

"I don't seem to be able to get myself worked up over it," Jerry said mildly. "I ain't got the feeling for it."

"Feeling, hell! You wouldn't dance if you were barefooted on a red hot stove! Use your imagination! Can't you pretend anything? Pretend he's a snake that has bit you! Pretend that he has insulted your mother, stolen your girl, eloped with your wife, or—or—oh, pretend he's taken your all-day sucker away from you! Maybe that 'll make you mad!"

King Lawler mercifully brought the farce to an end. "I say, Gordy, I don't believe we're being quite fair to Jerry. Any one can see that he isn't himself. Remember he's new to this game. I think, perhaps, he has a little touch of stage fright."

"A big streak of yellow, if you ask me!"

That ugly insult was in Grimes's biting, cutting sarcasm, and even as he heard it, and realized that he deserved it, Jerry North saw something that was worse, and knew that he deserved it, too—Ede, sitting in the front row of spectators, with her hands over her eyes to shut out the humiliating spectacle. Jerry's face was ghastly with make-up, and it wore the same old silly smile as he listened to Lawler's generous speech, but when he heard Grimes's snarl, and saw Ede's manifest distress, the

smile was erased from his face and his eyes lost their vacuity.

"Let's go!" he growled, and strode back to the place whence he had made so many false starts.

"That's better, North! Put a little more hate into it! Now—lights—cameras! Wade in!"

"A-a-ah!"

For those who may not have seen the picture, a word of explanation is necessary. The scene is a conventional library, of which the only feature that needs be mentioned is an opened wall safe in which reposes a document that means more than life or death to the good twin, Lawler, and to the evil twin, Jerry. The good twin is to survive the fight and carry off the precious paper.

King Lawler, poised lightly on the balls of his feet, had stepped in with lightning-like rapidity, feinted with his left, and driven his right into Jerry's face. *Wham—cr-r-unc-ch!*

It was a stunning blow, and might well have made Jerry see stars, but instead it served only to clear his addled brain and make him see red. Instinctively he resorted to an old trick, fell forward, grabbed Lawler at the knees, tossed him over his head, whirled, and was on him like a flash.

Then it was that that "A-a-ah!" went up from the spectators. They knew they were to see a real fight.

A human pinwheel with flying, flailing legs and arms moved up, down, across, and around, and in a matter of seconds the library was a wreck. Chairs and tables were overturned and smashed; vases crashed; a scuttle of coal beside the fireplace was sent ricocheting the length of the room, spraying its ebony contents.

The pinwheel halted for moments, here and there, now with one man uppermost, then the other—*thud! thud!*—and then it went again on its devastating way.

"Up! Up!" screamed Gordon, who didn't want his fighting all of one kind. "Stand up and slug each other!"

As if in obedience to instructions which they could not hear, nor would have heeded had they heard, the twins came to their feet in a straining, slipping clinch, broke, and began swapping punches. Right—left—right—left; arms were moving like piston rods and fists thudding home like the business ends of battering rams.

Then Jerry caught a wicked one on the

jaw, clinched, and they went down for another round of the rough and tumble, slugging, clawing, gouging, kicking—the very picture of a battle of primitive men.

VI

How many times they were up and down only the cameras could record, but finally, on one of their ups, spent by the fury of their exertions, they fell apart and stood swaying drunkenly as they gasped for breath. Their clothing was torn to shreds, and they were covered with blood, grime, and black spots and streaks, these last from contacts with the erstwhile contents of the coal hod.

"That's it! That's it! Circle around and glare at each other, and then—" Gordon was dancing up and down and yelling like a maniac. "That's it!" as they rushed together and went at it, hammer and tongs, give and take.

"Now for the finish! Put him out, King! Put him out!" But it was Lawler who was down, sent sprawling by a smashing left.

He was up in an instant, however, and as Jerry rushed he was met and checked with vicious rights and lefts to the body that sounded like beating a tattoo on a drum. Jerry gave ground under the punishment and Lawler pressed him.

"Attaboy!" Gordon shouted. "Knock him cold! That's enough, boys. Take one, Jerry, and go down and stay down. It's enough, I tell you. Play doggo!"

Jerry went down, but he was not out, and would not play doggo. He reached over and tripped Lawler, and they thrashed about the floor again, separated, and struggled weakly to their feet once more.

By this time both men were punch-drunk and staggering. Slowly Jerry's hands dropped to his sides, and Lawler landed at will blows that snapped Jerry's head first to one side and then the other.

"Now for the K. O.! End it!"

Gordon's cry was intended only for Lawler, but it galvanized Jerry, even as it did his opponent, to a supreme effort. Each reeling, tottering figure steadied itself for one last heart-breaking wallop, and both landed, Lawler to the chin and Jerry to the body.

Their weary legs sagged, and they toppled in a heap. It was the end for Jerry—oblivion as utter as it would have been welcome to Lawler—but the latter was an

actor as well as a fighter, and dared not let himself go.

Slowly and painfully the movie star dragged himself to his hands and knees, crawled over to the wall, pulled himself up to the opened safe, clutched the paper, and slumped off the set.

"Cut! Cut! It's over! It's over!" Gordon was nearly delirious. "Cut, you fools! It's over!" And, as the cameras ceased to click: "Oh, my God! Was there ever such a fight!"

VII

JERRY NORTH made two stations on his long journey back to consciousness.

At the first his mind struggled to realize the utter mess he had made of everything—he had killed Lawler, ruined the picture, forfeited any chance he might have had to be a movie actor, and lost Ede again.

At the second he had the vague sensation of being held tenderly in some one's arms, and of being kissed, and he felt that he wanted to tarry there indefinitely.

As from a distance he heard King Lawler's voice saying: "He's one fighting fool if there ever was one!" and Ede's indignant retort: "That's no reason why you should have tried to kill him, you brute!"

And Lawler's reply: "He'll take a lot of killing yet, and if you think he's bad off, look at the wreck I am!"

That speeded up Jerry's return. He hadn't killed Lawler, and he hadn't lost Ede. He tried to sit up, and failed, and to open his eyes, but could manage only the merest slit between the puffed up lids of one of them, and as for seeing, there was nothing doing. But he could speak, although his lips were thick and stiff.

"I'm—I'm sorry I spoiled the picture," he said.

It was Gordon who made reply. "Spoiled the picture? Why, man, it was the greatest fight scene ever filmed! And you made it, and I'm telling you you've got a job on this lot, doing rough stuff, until day after forever."

"Oh, Jerry, do you hear that? Isn't it wonderful?" Ede demanded.

Jerry hesitated a moment before speaking. Then he shook his head feebly.

"It's a great life, but not for me," he said. "I'm going back home and tell father I've had some sense pounded into me at last."

"Yes, Jerry," Ede agreed meekly.

The Crimson Girl

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—AVENGERS, FOLLOWING THE SPOOR
OF A TIGER WOMAN, BLUNDER IN FULL CRY ON
THE TRAIL OF AN INNOCENT MAID

By Charles K. Harris and Edna Sherry

IN this jazz-and-gin age, John Hathaway and his wife stood out as shining examples of parents who could bring up a daughter in the old-fashioned way.

Most children of the wealthy are hedged about and protected; Miriam Hathaway was raised like a hothouse orchid, under glass. From the day of her birth—when she was ushered into the world by no less than three of the greatest physicians in New York—until she was eighteen, she was guarded, served, watched, and instructed by the best specialists in their lines that money and thought could provide.

Her days were mapped out into careful half-hour periods rather like the checker-board of Alice's Looking-Glass Land.

From prayers at seven in the morning, followed by her gymnasium period, her French hour, her violin lesson, her dancing hour, her horseback ride, her visit to her grandmother, her school studies, and back to prayers at seven in the evening, every instant of her waking day was usefully occupied and carefully supervised.

It is doubtful if she even spent five minutes alone in the first sixteen years of her life.

Every evening at six o'clock she "visited" her parents in the big old-fashioned library downstairs, and reported what she had seen, done, and learned during the day.

Even in her early childhood her father had been a grim, silent, gray man, who listened to her without a smile, and, instead of praising her for her progress, used the occasion to lay down the stern precepts of duty which his stern parents had drilled into him.

Her mother was more gracious, a trifle softer in her manner to the little girl, but even her kiss was grave and cool, and Mi-

riam grew to womanhood without knowing the meaning of the word "cuddle."

Her governess was a bloodless woman of impeccable ancestry named Miss Minturn, capable, kind, but totally unfitted to provide companionship to an impulsive, imaginative child.

Miriam was not unhappy—she was kept too busy for that—but she was never actively happy. If she was taken to the theater, it was not for sheer amusement, but because it was a play every one should see.

If she went to the opera, it was not for the romantic story and scenery, but because Mozart and Humperdinck improved the mind.

In the same way her dancing lessons were for the benefit of her posture, and after she was twelve, even the little social classes composed of boys and girls were eliminated, and she had her lessons in private.

The Hathaways, by virtue of their family traditions and wealth, had the entrée to the best and most exclusive circles in America, but society meant nothing to them. Invitations to dinners, receptions, balls, and teas, arrived regularly, and, just as regularly, Mrs. Hathaway's secretary refused them politely but definitely.

The odd part of it was that nobody minded in the least. They were accepted simply as people who did not "go out."

They were, however, serious patrons of the opera and the symphony concerts, and went to an occasional musicale or charity function.

Charitable works and church played a great part in Mrs. Hathaway's life, while her husband was wrapped up in his immense business interests, which included railroads, mines, banks, and oil fields.

It was a grim sort of household for a child to grow up in, full of shadows and gravity. Miriam scarcely knew what she was missing, because she had no one to enlighten her as to any other sort of life. She was practically friendless.

Her parents disapproved of a formal début into society, and when she was eighteen, a time when most girls are healthily occupied with other girls and boys in a gay camaraderie, she spent her days either in study, or at concerts, or charity work with her mother.

It was at a charity bazaar that she got her first glimpse of actualities, from another girl of her age.

Miriam was in charge of the cigarette stall, and found the business too rushing to handle alone. She little guessed that the young men were crowding about her booth in astonished tribute to her beauty.

With her black hair parted demurely in the middle, and drawn severely down over her ears to a knot behind her head, her lovely profile stood out like a cameo, transmuted to glowing life by her soft color and wide pansy-blue eyes.

Over and over, admiring youths returned for cigarettes, only to get another glimpse of her quaint old-world loveliness, and hoping against hope to "hand her a line," as they put it.

But Miriam's smile and thanks for their patronage were grave and unconsciously remote, which sent them away, only to return with redoubled determination.

After she told Mrs. Van Siclen, the chairman, that she thought the business warranted two girls behind the cigarette counter, a delightful impish little blonde came to the booth.

"I'm Sally Montgomery," she said, "come to offer first aid to the rushed. I expect you realize the extreme honor of being behind this booth?"

"Is it an honor? I didn't know. I only have it because Miss Wembley is ill and couldn't come to-day."

"Lovely Lily's understudy, are you? They always pick the prettiest girl for the cigarettes. Men are awfully charitable when they're getting an eyeful."

"An eyeful of what?"

Sally gave a shout of laughter. "Oh, you adorable Victorian darling! Yes, Teddy, Pall-Malls, isn't it? Five dollars for twenty? You sweet old thing. I love a charitable chap."

The boys clustered about Sally, both because she was popular wherever she went, and because they wanted a formal introduction to the quaint Hathaway beauty.

II

At seven o'clock Mrs. Van Siclen brought some one to relieve Miriam and Sally, and the two girls went together to the dressing room for their wraps. Sally yawned, and stretched her arms in luxurious relief.

"Thank Heaven, that's over! I do one day a year for my sins. It's deadly, but I do feel that I can be as devilish as I like in the evening after being an angel of mercy all afternoon. Me for the Ink Pot to-night."

"The Ink Pot?" echoed Miriam.

"Night club, silly."

"Night club?"

"Good Lord, child, you're not an original, are you? One of those weird creatures who've lived according to nature and that rot?"

"Of course not. I've lived a perfectly ordinary life—I just happen not to know what a—night club is. Though I suppose it's just a sort of club you go to at night, isn't it?"

Sally gave her an affectionate squeeze.

"You precious darling! I keep calling you a darling, don't I? But I just can't help it. It's just what you are. Tell me, do you really mean to say that you've never been to a night club?"

"Never. What do you do there?"

"Dance, mostly, and drink a bit."

"I can dance, of course; but what do you drink?"

Sally whimsically threw up appealing hands to heaven.

"My dear girl, how badly you've been educated!" she said.

Miriam flushed.

"I suppose I'm stupid," she said humbly, "because I've really been quite well educated. Tutors and instructors of all kinds."

"Tutors are—out. What you need is a boy friend."

"I wish I had a friend of my own age, boy or girl." At the childish wistfulness of her tone, Sally suppressed her ready chuckle at the interpretation of "boy friend."

"You poor dear," she said. "You don't mean to say—"

"I do. I suppose I'm ungrateful, because I have a lovely home, and good, kind parents; but it gets very lonely always being with older people. Father and mother often take me to the opera, and the theater; but somehow I imagine it must be delightful to have a really young person to talk over the love parts with."

"But, surely, you go to parties—dances, the Junior League thing, and so on?"

"Mother doesn't approve of them. She wants me to have a purpose in life."

Sally, with a grim little frown of determination, decided that here was some rescue work for her idle hands to do. It seemed to her an utter waste for Miriam's beauty and youth to go unseen, and she resolved impishly to awaken the girl to a justifiable rebellion.

Sally was popular enough not to grudge another girl success, and besides, it intrigued her to see what she could mold out of such virgin clay.

They arranged to meet on the bridle path in Central Park next morning when Miriam took her daily ride, and there began a series of enlightening talks to which Miriam listened breathlessly.

Sally had often to resort to words of one syllable, or at least to translate her racy slang into academic English; but after half a dozen morning meetings, Miriam began to get a picture of a world, gay, colorful, and tempting, which she was forbidden to enter.

She lay awake at night thinking, longing, hungering for the gayety which was her birthright. And slowly there grew within her a dim, deep resentment at being deprived of her heritage of youth. Gradually the feeling grew. She came to regard her parents as jailers, and her home as a prison—luxurious, but still a prison.

A month after her first meeting with Sally, Miriam's father was called to England by the serious illness of his father. The elder Hathaway was past eighty, and his son, with a strong filial sense, sailed at once, with his wife.

They left Miriam in New York with Miss Minturn, who, now that the girl no longer needed a governess, filled the post of companion.

They had no qualms of uneasiness about leaving Miriam alone in the old house; they felt it was as probable for the Woolworth Tower to dance a jig as for Miriam to do anything indiscreet or inappropriate.

The day after their departure Miriam rode as usual in the park, and to her delight met Sally on the bridle path.

She had begun to look forward to these meetings as the one bright spot in her day, and was unbelievably disappointed if she missed Sally. The two girls cantered easily side by side, the grooms a discreet distance behind.

"I've been racking my brains," said Sally, "to think of a costume for the Art and Artists."

"The—what?"

"The Art and Artists' Ball, the swagger Bohemian affair of the year. It's a week from Saturday—costume and mask."

"Everybody goes—the smart set, the theatrical mob, and the—ah—half world. And with masks on you'd never know one crowd from the other."

"They all have the same number of arms and legs, and I've seen girls I've grown up with dance in a way that self-respecting cocottes would scorn to do. It's wonderful the nerve you have when your face is covered."

"How exciting it sounds! Wouldn't I love to go!"

"Send you a card to-morrow. Billy Hargrave 'll wangle it for me. Fearfully hard to get in."

"Oh, I'd never be allowed!"

"Well, suit yourself. I'll send the card so if you change your mind— But that's not helping me any. What I want to know is what I shall go as. I'm fed up with Watteau shepherdesses, and Cleopatras. What do you think would suit my strange and stirring type of beauty?"

Miriam laughed. She was an appreciative audience. "I'm afraid I can't help you much," she said. "What had you thought of?"

"Well, I'd love to go as the Crimson Girl."

"The Crimson Girl?" echoed Miriam.

"Oh, you know, the musical comedy—Ziegler's big skit that Vera Astore's starring in. She's the Crimson Girl—she wears this stunning costume of flame-colored velvet—perfectly tight-fitting, high-necked in front right up to her chin, and then—no back at all—bare down to the waist."

"And on the left shoulder, where any one might reasonably wear a flower or a rosette, there is a tiny narrow pocket with a little jeweled dagger in it. In the show

she does first a dagger dance, and then a nice sultry murder with it.

"The show's a roar. There's a Crimson Girl red, and a Crimson Girl shoe, and a Vera Astore walk—all the earmarks of success. I'd love to go in the costume, but I'm so little and blond; it takes a tall, dark, haughty creature like the Astore—or you, for that matter—to get away with it."

"How could you get a costume just like hers, if you wanted it?"

"Of course, Pillsby's—Madison Avenue. He does nothing else but fancy dress. I thought, for awhile, of going as Brunhild in miniature—I'd be a riot. All the Brunhilds at the Metropolitan are regular truck horses, and I'm such a half portion—what do you think?"

Miriam was shocked to hear the revered Wagnerian sopranos called "truck horses," but the awakening youth and mischief in her giggled as she recalled their generous proportions.

"I think you'd be adorable in a tiny suit of armor," she said.

After they separated, the one to dash away to lunch at the Ritz with some man, and the other to put in an hour's violin practice, the seed Sally had sown, germinated and sprouted in Miriam's mind. Brahms had no meaning for her as her bow slipped mechanically across the strings.

What a fascinating name, "The Art and Artists' Ball!" If only—

"It takes a tall, dark, haughty creature, like the Astore—or you, for that matter—to get away with it." Sally's words made her glow with a new realization that her appearance was worthy of comment.

Then she blushed at her self-consciousness, and with a determined mind began the Brahms concerto over again. But the thought would not be banished. All day long vagrant phrases and visions flashed through her mind.

"Pillsby, Madison Avenue." "A little pocket with a dagger in it." "It's wonderful the nerve you have when your face is covered." "I'll send a card, so if you change your mind—" That last was the most thrilling of all.

Sally had said it casually, as if it were not the most tremendous thing in the world. How easy it was for Sally to go, as matter-of-fact as eating her breakfast—and how incredibly hard for Miriam even to imagine herself dressing and sallying forth to this fascinating ball!

She lay awake for hours that night, wearing delicious fancies, and dreaming breathless daydreams. She saw herself as a sort of modern Cinderella, coming unheralded to the ball, and conquering instantly by her beauty and charm.

And then, suddenly, an imp—undoubtedly with horns—whispered softly in her ear, "Why not? Why not?" The thought took her breath away.

Impatiently she tried to fling it out of her mind. "How could I? What would father and mother say? They'd die of horror. And Miss Minturn? She'd faint if I as much as mentioned it. And how on earth could I get a costume?"

The imp edged closer. "Pillsby's, of course; Madison Avenue. Just tell them to make you a Crimson Girl outfit, silly! It's easy."

The morning found her pale and unnerved. Trifling as the issue was, it was a tremendous crisis in Miriam's placid life. She went about her daily routine preoccupied, and with a vaguely glowing light in her eyes. After lunch Miss Minturn, with a stifled yawn, asked her what she would prefer to do—a concert or a visit to the Museum of Art.

"If you don't mind, Miss Minturn, I really believe I would rather stay in and write letters and read." A look of relief passed over Miss Minturn's dull, well-bred face.

"Just as you say, my dear. Then I think I shall go up and rest. I have been sleeping rather badly of late."

She was hardly out of the room when the imp redoubled its attack:

"Now's your chance. Sneak upstairs and get your wraps and hurry down to Pillsby's. He'll ask at least a week to make a costume. You sniveling coward, have a good time for once. Nobody'll ever know. A masked ball. The chance of a lifetime. Silly, what are you hanging back for?"

Hypnotized by the imp—Freud, no doubt, would call it the subconscious ego—Miriam did just what it suggested, and an hour later, after a trip to her bank, she was closeted with the great Pillsby himself. Miriam, quite unlike her usual gentle self, was direct, and quietly autocratic.

"I wish an exact replica of Vera Astore's flame-colored dress in the 'Crimson Girl'—dagger and all. It must be ready at the latest, Saturday, the tenth. I will

pay you now. The name is—Smith, and I will call for it in person."

The astute Pillsby recognized "class," and suspected a mystery, but diplomatically bowed, and charged her a staggering price. She paid it without the flicker of an eyelash, and went into the fitting room to have her measure taken.

When she slipped into the house again, Miss Minturn was still "resting."

III

VERA ASTARE slammed the receiver on the hook, and flew excitedly to her dressing table. She dabbed rouge hurriedly on her smooth olive cheeks, and penciled delicate shadows under her long, almond-shaped eyes. Then she selected a lip-stick, and took off the cap. At sight of it, she started up in a rage.

"Sophia!" she cried angrily. A middle-aged negress with patient eyes came in, a look of mingled stoicism and fear in her face. Sophia had come up from Alabama but a year before.

"Yaas, Miss Vera? You-all calling?"

"How many times must I tell you a thing to get it done? I told you to throw away these light lip-sticks."

"Tha's right, Miss Vera, I sho done forgot it."

"Where's the dark one?"

"The one Mr. La Rue done give you?"

"Yes, and hurry up about it. He'll be here in five minutes."

"You don't say, Miss Vera! I sho am glad. It's most a week since he's been near us."

"Shut up, you idiot! Where's the lip-stick? And it's only five days since he was here." Her voice, in spite of her anger, was defensive. "It seems more, because I'm used to having him run in and out of here two and three times a day."

The panther-like woman at the mirror turned suddenly, and flung the discarded lip-stick at her.

"Get out!" she cried to Sophia. "And take that with you, and get out the whisky and soda."

Sophia, only too glad to escape so easily, departed with alacrity.

Vera Astare, her touching-up completed, surveyed the effect in the long triple mirror. She was very beautiful, svelte as a cat, and dark as a gypsy; but a thin shell of hardness incased her, the result of a cruel streak in her nature, and of her years.

For she was just past thirty, and while still a popular idol to the public, the specter of age, of becoming passé, and no longer able to allure any man at any time, haunted her. She was a primitive creature, violent in all her emotions, and quite uncivilized where it came to self-control or diplomacy.

Satisfied with her looks, and her flowing black-and-orange tea gown, she settled herself into a telling pose among the cushions in the living room—a room that reflected her in its brilliant splashes of color.

She was only just in time. She heard the voice of her maid at the front door, and a man's firm, fast stride through the hall of the apartment. Rush La Rue stopped at the door, an annoyed look on his handsome, dissipated face.

"Well, what was the big idea of the hurry call?" he asked. "I thought you were dying, from the sound of your voice."

She did not alter her lazy pose, but her breast rose and fell stormily.

"Oh! So I've got to be dying to bring you around here, nowadays?"

"Not at all, my dear girl. Glad you're not. Only I happened to be rather—busy at the moment, and I thought it must be something deucedly important, the way you spoke."

"Rather *busy*, were you?" she echoed.

"Who is she?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Vera. It was Boyd, from Louisville. He wants me to bring my string of horses up to Belmont for the spring meeting. Naturally, there are a lot of details."

"I don't believe you!"

"Just as you like, my dear. If it gives you any pleasure to imagine I was dancing at the Ritz with a juicy little flapper, don't let me stop you."

Vera rose from the couch with a spring, and threw herself into his arms.

"Rush! Rush!" she cried passionately.

"What's the matter? Why have you changed? You don't love me any more. Something has happened to you. I—I can't bear it!" Over her head he raised his eyebrows resignedly.

"Please, my dearest girl, don't let us start on that key again. Of course I love you, and I haven't changed. Why should you think so?"

"You've not been here for five days, and you didn't even kiss me when you came in!"

He gave her an excellent imitation of a lovely kiss, but Vera was not used to imitations of any kind from him. She clung convulsively to him, crying at the same time.

"You're different! Even your kisses are. Rush, darling, tell me you really love me."

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Then where have you been all these days?"

"Busy. Putting through a couple of big deals."

"And you swear you haven't been running around with some woman?"

"My dear girl, you are really rather difficult—and unwise. Let me point to you that nothing irritates and wearies a man quite as much as constant recriminations and suspicions."

"But I love you so—and I am so unhappy."

"You haven't the least cause in the world."

Her mercurial temperature bounded to the other end of the scale. From being suppliant, she became imperious and insolent.

"Well, just let me catch you with another girl, that's all!"

He smiled, a slow amused smile.

"And what would you do?" he asked.

"I—I'd kill you! No other woman's going to have you—ever!"

"You'd make a delightful defendant in a murder trial. You'd win over any jury that wasn't totally blind. And now, suppose you give me a drink and tell me why you phoned me."

Over their high balls, Vera said: "It's about Saturday—the Art and Artists' affair. We've got to arrange what costumes we'll wear."

"I shan't wear any. I won't be here."

"But, Rush darling, you promised—"

"I'm sorry," he said curtly. "I've got to run down to Kentucky about the horses."

"The biggest ball of the year! Surely you could arrange somehow—"

"Impossible. But there's no reason why you should miss it, too."

"Go without you?"

"Why not? I am sure there are a dozen willing substitutes for your humble servant," he said with a little ironical bow.

"A lot you care about me," she exclaimed jealously, "shunting me off on

somebody else. And I wouldn't be surprised if you were planning to go to the ball on your own, without me."

"Vera!" He spoke with a cold indignation. "If you go on nagging me and doubting me, you'll certainly drive me away, in the long run. A jealous woman is a—horror."

Secretly he was shocked at her clear-eyed suspicions; for they were quite correct. Her violence and intensity were beginning to pall on him, and he was doing his best to break with her, to let her down easily.

The trip to Kentucky was a figment of his active imagination, and he was planning to do just the thing she accused him of—go alone to the Art and Artists' Ball.

Eventually he soothed her back to confidence in him, and with a well-assumed reluctance, rose to leave.

"This is *au revoir* for a week or so, my dear. I shall be frightfully rushed, and you know how I hate writing, so don't worry if you don't hear from me. I'll be thinking of you. And be a good little girl at the Art and Artists' Ball, and—"

"I shan't go. If you don't, I won't. It wouldn't be any fun without you."

But on Saturday, the day of the Art and Artists' Ball, Vera changed her mind. Richard Clark, who played opposite her in the "Crimson Girl," was responsible for the change.

Waiting in the wings for their entrance cue during the matinee performance, he said to her casually: "Saw your boy friend this morning." Vera whirled upon him.

"Where?"

"Over at Tony's place. Taking a little drink."

"You couldn't have made a mistake."

"Is zat so? I'm not cuckoo yet. It was La Rue all right. Come on. There's our cue."

All her suspicions returned in force, and her execution of the "sultry murder" in the play was realistic in the extreme.

IV

At about the same time, Miriam slipped into her house carrying a large, unwieldy box. She reached her room unchallenged and was about to congratulate herself on the ease with which her plans were going through, when the little negro chambermaid came in.

"Miss Miriam, honey, Miss Minturn says would you please come down to the

library for one moment." Miriam pushed the box into her closet and turned.

"Tell her I'll be down at once, Emily."

Emily left the room, and Miriam looked about for some safer place to hide her bulky secret. She was vexed that Emily had seen the box, but reasoned that it was only her guilty conscience that made the incident look suspicious.

Probably Emily hadn't even noticed it; and if she had, never gave it another thought. In the end she left the box where it was, and went downstairs.

But she had not reckoned on Emily's insatiable curiosity. Hardly was her room empty and the coast clear, when the little negress stole back and crept cautiously to the closet.

"Lawd sakes!" she breathed excitedly. "Whatever is she all doin' with a red velvet dress, and a sword, and a mask. The little rascal! She's steppin' out while her paw's away!"

Suddenly her chocolate face turned a dirty gray. Miriam had come back.

"Emily, what are you doing?" she asked sharply.

"Please forgive me, Miss Miriam. I sho didn't mean nothin'. I'se just nachelly a most terrible curious chile, and I took a peep at the red dress with the lil dagger. I guess you goin' to some swell party while your folks is away."

Biting her lips with annoyance, Miriam dismissed the girl curtly, but the little incident remained, and rasped her keyed-up nerves. It irked her to feel herself to some extent in Emily's power, and she was startled by the shrewdness of the girl's surmise. Finally, with a shrug, she threw off the memory of it.

Meanwhile Emily slipped down to the kitchen, where she held the center of the stage during her recital of the incredible news that the demure Miriam was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

At dinner that evening Miriam was far too excited to eat. This fact bore out her story that she had a violent headache, and she was permitted to go to bed without question from the totally unsuspecting Miss Minturn.

By ten o'clock the household was settled for the night, and the house in darkness.

Softly Miriam rose, and began her preparations. With hands trembling with excitement, she lifted her costume from its box, and slipped it on.

The act seemed to change her very nature. She was no longer the timid, repressed girl of her daily life; she held her lovely little head at a new imperious angle. Her cheeks were flushed with a glorious anticipation, and the rich folds of the red velvet brought out every curve of her slim young body.

She threw a long, dark wrap over her glowing costume, and with infinite care slowly opened her bedroom door. The hall was dark, but she knew every turn of the old house.

Step by step, as silently as a ghost, she crept down the wide stairs to the big front door. Softly she pushed back the heavy chain and bolts, slipped through the door, and was down the stone steps.

She drew a long breath—so far so good. At the corner she picked up a passing taxi, and gave the address of the famous hotel where the Art and Artists' Ball was being held.

In ten minutes, divested of her wraps, and with her crimson mask adjusted, she joined the throng on the huge ballroom floor of the roof garden. From the first she was a success. Her lithe figure, her softly waving dark hair, and her striking and well-known costume created a sensation.

She was besieged with partners, and after a few moments' diffidence found that her dancing instruction stood her in good stead. She was a born dancer, and readily followed the lead of her partners.

The scene was a brilliant one. The immense room was decorated with futuristic friezes of vivid orange and blue calico, startling, and yet somehow in keeping with the gay, riotous crowd. Confetti thrown by the onlookers in the boxes wreathed the dancers, and added color to the picture. The alcoves and side rooms where punch was served were well patronized.

Every moment the noise, the laughter, and the dancing grew wilder and more reckless. The costumes of the guests added their note to the general blare. They ranged from the beautiful and artistic to the comic and grotesque. The whole atmosphere intoxicated Miriam as with some strange, heavy wine.

She was dancing with a purple-togaed Roman when a tall figure in a black velvet domino cut in and separated her from her partner. He put his arms masterfully about her and whirled her away. Most of

her partners had been good dancers, but the Black Domino was superlative.

They floated on to the droning rhythmic jazz, not as a couple, but as one perfect entity. Miriam closed her eyes, under her velvet mask, and gave herself over to the ecstasy of the moment.

Come what might, she would never forget the perfection of this one dance. Her partner seemed to sense her feeling; for he, too, surrendered to the magic of the motion and the music, and danced without a word of the usual banter and raillery.

Then, abruptly, on a whining croon, the music stopped. With a start, Miriam opened her eyes and withdrew a little from his arms, but the man bent toward her with a husky whisper:

"You wonderful creature! I shan't let you go. We were made to dance together. You're mine for to-night. No one else shall dance with you."

She gave a little uncertain laugh. His powerful personality seemed to hypnotize her, to rob her of all initiative.

"Do you hear?" he asked.

"I hear," she murmured through the thick beating of her heart.

The music of the encore began, and they drifted away again on a sea of rapture.

Stags tried to cut in on their dances, but Black Domino held her against them all.

After a few more dances together, the beauty of their performance began to be observed as if by prearrangement; when the music started a peculiar African melody, the dancers melted away, and Miriam and Black Domino found themselves alone on the floor, doing practically an exhibition dance.

Scraps of conversation reached her.

"That's Rush La Rue, I'll bet a million. He dances like no one else on earth—"

"The costume's Vera's; but who the deuce is the girl in it?"

"The Astaire'll be wild. Serve her jolly well right, too."

Deafening applause followed their dance, and Miriam whispered:

"Take me out of this. I—I can't stand any more. It's too—much!"

The intoxication of the moment, her success, her hour of liberty, and the curious fascination of her partner were indeed too much for the girl. She was close to hysteria as La Rue—the idle observer had been right—led her to a small, empty, dimly lighted room.

He drew her down to a wide, low divan directly back of which hung long portières which masked the door leading into another side room. They were both too engrossed to notice that the draperies were swaying just a trifle.

La Rue leaned toward her, his lips close to her ear.

"You lovely little siren; you've bewitched me."

Miriam moved restlessly.

"Don't, please!" she begged. "I'm excited—everything's so—bewildering. I'm—frightened."

"Of what, dear?"

"I don't know," she replied uncertainly.

"I—do. You're afraid of your heart, of your own feelings for—me. Sweet, I am, too. I'm mad for you. I adore you." He turned her face up to his, and tried to kiss her lips, below the little red mask, but she leaned away from him and rose, panting.

"Don't, don't, don't!" she cried.

But "don't" had never deterred Rush La Rue. It gave an added zest to the chase, and the fact that he had been patronizing the punch rather freely may have added to his ruthlessness. His arms tightened about her as he attempted to reach her lips again.

"If you kiss me, I'll—I'll—kill you," she gasped. La Rue laughed. This was good fun.

"Oh—you will? How, my little fighting cock—an upper cut, or a right jab?"

His lips had found hers now, and her horror and desperation gave her strength to wrench free. Her hand sought the tiny dagger that completed her costume, and she drew it out. La Rue grasped her wrist, with another of his maddening laughs, and the little weapon clattered to the floor.

And then abruptly the portières parted, there was a silver flash, La Rue's laugh ended in a gasp, and he fell forward on the rug at her feet.

Panic got her by the throat. She could not even scream. Wildly she looked about to get away from the writhing thing on the floor. She could easily have slipped back into the ballroom, but somehow that did not answer her needs.

She felt she must get clear away—from the ball, and the neighborhood, before she was somehow connected with this horror. Her eye fell on a half open window.

She dashed to it and, with a prayer of

thanks, saw that there was a fire escape outside it. Once down that, and out in the street, she would be safe. She was over the sill in a flash, and began her descent of the steep, precarious iron ladder.

Meanwhile, in the room she had left, pandemonium reigned. No one knew who first gave the alarm, but almost instantly a screaming, excited mob poured in from the ballroom, with cries of horror.

Two men pushed forward authoritatively, the hotel manager and Captain Daly, the detective in charge, detailed to cover the Art and Artists' Ball. Daly went swiftly to the grim figure and bent over it.

"Dead!" he muttered. "Murdered!" He turned to the manager. "Close all doors. No one may leave the place. I want some information."

"It's Rush La Rue," volunteered a voice.

"He came in here with the Crimson Girl," said another.

"Where's this Crimson Girl? Get hold of her."

From the thick of the crowd a woman said:

"She's gone. She went down the fire escape."

Like a flash, Daly ran to the window. A figure, dim and indistinct, was indeed making its slow progress down the ladder a few flights below. He turned to a plain-clothes man who had by this time made his way through the throng.

"Quick, Joe, rush the fire escape. Take the elevator, and run around to the alley, and cut her off. I'll watch this end."

He regretted that he was bound to remain on the scene. He would have liked to climb down the fire escape and nail this Crimson Girl himself. But his place was here to see that nothing was touched near the dead man.

He stood at the window, his eyes trying to pierce the darkness. The room was curiously still as all the guests waited for news from below.

Not quite all; counting on the riveted attention of the crowd, a masked and dominoed figure slipped like a wraith through a curtained doorway and disappeared.

Slowly, tortuously, Miriam felt her way down the interminable flights of steps. Halfway down she heard noises above her, and paused for one swift upward glance.

One glance was enough. Daly's bulky shoulders, framed in the light behind him,

told her that her escape was discovered. Doggedly she renewed her descent, trembling so that she could hardly stand.

And then running footsteps echoed in the court below her. She saw a flash light flicker, and turn up to pierce the darkness about her. She was trapped.

If she went down any farther, the pencil of light would find her. If she went all the way down she would walk straight into the arms of the police. She choked back a sob of desperation, and gritted her chattering teeth.

She could not go on, she could not go back, and she could not remain where she was, like a fly on a wall, to await capture by the enemy. She did the only thing that was left for her; she pushed up the nearest window and stepped into a strange room.

V

TONY GORDON lit his pipe, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and buckled down to work. He had plenty to do if he expected to be packed and on the road by one o'clock, as he had planned.

A pleasant smile lit up his clean-cut, humorous face as he thought of the long silent run through the night, and the fascinating new life that lay in wait for him.

Tony was that unique thing, a victim of circumstances who refused to remain a victim.

The son of a rich and indulgent father, he had run the gamut of extravagance before he was twenty. The best prep schools, a luxurious life at Yale, his own yacht to run up to New York in, the finest polo ponies, all these he had enjoyed while Gordon Senior was alive.

It must be confessed that the sum total of Tony's accomplishments from these advantages consisted of a hard-bitten athletic physique, and a talent for eccentric dancing.

At college he shone, not in classics, but in classical dancing. He was the star and life of the dramatic club and the senior show. Not only could he take his own part with éclat, but he had a knack of tuning up the other players, arranging intricate chorus dances, and grouping stage pictures successfully.

He loved the work, and when, at his father's death, it was found that Gordon's affairs were in hopeless confusion, and his inheritance to his son a mass of debts, Tony turned his gift to good account.

His friends were very kind; they offered him any number of sinecures, from club secretaryships to automobile sales positions. But Tony thanked them all gratefully but firmly, and went his way.

His first job was "small-time" clog dancing, with a try-out in Weehawken. In six months he was on the big circuit, and in a year doing specialty dancing in one of the famous New York revues.

It was when the new edition of the revue was rehearsing that Tony felt his way to the work he really loved. He hung around the theater during rehearsal, even when he himself was not required on the scene.

It fascinated him to watch a harmonious whole being built up from the chaos that confronted the stage director at the beginning of operations. Unobtrusively he stuck close to the director, Sims, and one day, in the face of a knotty stage problem, ventured to offer a suggestion.

Sims, already wrought to a frenzy by the indifference and stupidity of some of the beautiful show girls, turned on Tony, ready to rend him, as an outlet to his feelings.

But even as he opened his mouth the soundness of Tony's suggestion struck him. He was a fair man, and he gave Tony his due. "That's an idea," he said thoughtfully, scratching his ear. "Let's see if we can get these Doras to try it."

The "Doras" tried it, and it worked out beautifully. Nothing more was said, and Tony continued to watch unobtrusively. Then another opportunity arose, and he was ready again with a suggestion that smoothed out difficulties, and made for an effective stage picture. On this occasion Sims turned to him curiously:

"What are you wasting your time dancing for? Your line's directing, if I know anything."

Tony laughed.

"It is," he said, "but how am I to break it to the producers? Up-to-date they have not swarmed to my door for my services, and—one must eat."

"H-m, well." Sims considered a moment. "Tell you what. Keep on with your number in the show, but help me on the side. Take that Kongo song number and punch it into shape, and I'll see what I can do for you."

That was a year before. And to-night Tony was to try his wings alone. Sims had recommended him to Gould, the pro-

ducer, and he was leaving for Chicago to put on a spring revue that would come to New York the following fall.

He had gone far in the year, for both Gould and Sims had discovered real producing stuff in him, and they were allowing him a perfectly free hand, even to the engaging of any additions to the cast if he saw fit.

Rehearsals were to begin in two weeks, but Tony had plenty of work to do before that time. He still had his smart gray roadster from the days of his luxury, and he decided to drive West instead of going by rail.

He loved the country, and night driving particularly appealed to him; it was good fun to slip silently and swiftly through the mysterious dark, past scores of peaceful empty villages and towns.

He expected to be away for two months at least, and he had already settled his account at his hotel, and given up his room. There remained only to pack his big stage trunk, for storage, and his grips. The roadster was parked outside.

Tony was throwing grotesque dancing costumes pell-mell into the trunk with a joyous consciousness that if all went well with the Chicago revue he need never assume the ridiculous stage clothes again.

He picked up a silk and velvet Spanish costume, and stuffed it into the trunk with a grimace of distaste. He had always hated that particular get-up, a silly, effeminate thing.

A bell boy's costume brought a grin to his face. He had had it copied from the hotel uniform, and he remembered the night it had arrived from the costumer's.

While he was trying it on, a *bona-fide* bell boy from downstairs had come in with a telegram, and the shocked horror in his face when he saw what he took to be a brother bell boy disporting himself in Mr. Gordon's room, still amused him.

This, too, he tossed into the trunk with a few old wigs, his make-up box, and the odds and ends of an actor's paraphernalia. The big trunk was only half full, but after a look around the room, Tony found he had nothing more to put into it.

He sat down to write out a label, directed to the storage house, when he heard a noise in the bathroom. He rose to investigate when the bathroom door opened, and a girl, masked, disheveled, and panting, burst into the room.

"Save me, hide me!" she cried. "Don't let them get me!"

"Them? Who?" he asked, bewildered.

"The police. They trapped me on the fire escape. There's been a murder—at least, I don't know if he's dead."

"Suppose you calm down a bit and tell me the whole story."

"There isn't time. I was at the ball upstairs, and this man tried to kiss me—he was horrible—and I drew the dagger I was wearing—but he made me drop it.

"And just as I dropped it, some one parted the curtains behind us and stabbed him in the back. It sounds ridiculous, I know; you probably think I did it, and I'm lying—but—oh, I didn't—I swear."

"I believe you—"

"And then I felt I had to get away—and I climbed down the fire escape. I got this far when I saw people at the window above, and in the court at the foot of the fire escape; so I just climbed into the first window I could."

A knock at the door startled them into silence. Then Tony, with one swift movement, dragged her to the open trunk.

He pulled out an armful of clothing, and silently helped her into the roomy space, piled the clothing on the top of her, and closed the lid. Then he sat down at his desk and continued addressing his label.

"Come in," he called.

Captain Daly walked into the room.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," he said, "but has any one tried to get in here?"

Tony looked sufficiently blank.

"Why, no; I've been here for some time—"

"Through the window, I mean."

"Not in here; you might try the bathroom." Daly took the bathroom in one stride, and looked around.

"The window's open," he said suspiciously.

"It always is," replied Tony. "What's happened, anyway? Burglars?"

"No—murder. Rush La Rue stabbed to death, and this Crimson Girl did it. A cool hand—wiped off the blade, and left it behind. She went into some room off the fire escape, and we're trying 'em all. She can't get away, though. Every exit's watched, and while we don't know her face, we do know her costume."

"But what's to prevent her from changing into some other dress, if she has the luck to get into an empty room."

"No woman at all gets out of this hotel to-night," replied Daly grimly.

Tony laughed.

"I hope you don't restrain men, too. I'm leaving in twenty minutes for the West, and I shouldn't like to be held up—although if I had time I'd like to stick around and get in on the excitement."

"No, I guess you can go, all right. Well, I'll look further. Much obliged. Sorry to have disturbed you."

"That's all right. Good night."

The door closed behind Daly. Tony, listening intently, heard no footsteps down the hall. He smiled, and went back to his desk.

He was writing a second label when the door opened silently, and Daly reappeared. Tony repressed a grin as he turned. Daly, slightly embarrassed, cleared his throat, and mumbled:

"I just came back to tell you it might be as well for you to lock your door."

"Thanks. I will—although nobody could get much here. My stuff's all packed."

Daly disappeared, satisfied apparently, of Tony's good faith, and this time there were footsteps in the hall as the detective went to the floor below.

VI

TONY locked the door, and helped Miriam out of the trunk.

"You must be nearly smothered," he whispered.

"Not quite," she returned. "But oh—what am I going to do? I heard what he said about no woman leaving the hotel."

"Now, listen. We're safe from interruption now, I think. Suppose you take off your mask, and sit down and tell me all about it—from start to finish, names, addresses, and circumstances—all in confidence, of course."

She considered for a moment, and then quietly removed her mask. Tony was hard put to it to restrain a gasp of sheer wonder at her loveliness.

She sat down obediently and began her story from the beginning, from the seed of revolt planted by Sally Montgomery to the debacle of twenty minutes ago. Tony listened in silence, broken only once at mention of Sally, when he exclaimed:

"Little Sally Montgomery! We were pals in the old days."

At the end he sat frowning with the con-

centration of furious thought. Miriam raised timid eyes to his, fearful of his decision.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Do? Help you, of course. You know, the best course of all would be to call on that detective chap, and tell him exactly what you told me."

"He'd never believe me."

"Why not? I believe you."

"But it's so—wild, so incredible. I don't know why you do believe me. You heard what he said about wiping off the blade. They'd never believe there was any one back of the curtains."

"You may be right— Well, then, I'll get you out of this and take you home, and nobody 'll be the wiser that you were the Crimson Girl."

"If you can only do that!"

"I can," he said cheerily. "I'll wangle it somehow, and to-morrow morning, when you're at breakfast, reading the horrid headlines about the wicked Crimson Girl, you can hug yourself and think that no one in the wide world could ever connect you with such a naughty, naughty person."

He was surprised to see her start up with a gasp of horror.

"Emily!" she cried with white lips. She told him how she had found the little negress prying into the box, and saying that the dress and dagger must be meant for some "swell party."

Emily would devour the details of the murder, and inevitably connect Miriam with the Crimson Girl. Pillsby would come forward with the information that he had made the costume, and identify her as the mysterious purchaser, alias "Smith." She shuddered.

"I tell you I can't go home— You don't know my parents. Even if I were believed about not—murdering, the scandal and shame would be more than I could bear, if I had to face my parents."

"If you'll only get me out of here somehow, I'll run away and hide; I can work and begin my life over again—anything, *anything* rather than go home after this."

She was close to hysteria, and for the moment Tony dropped the idea of taking her home. He had heard his father speak of old "Granite Hathaway," and to some extent realized her feelings.

"All right," he said soothingly. "Then home is canned, *pro tem*. My car's outside, and we can discuss the future, once

you've run the gantlet of the exit watchers, and breathe fresh air again.

"Now here's what I call a noble idea." He rummaged in the trunk and pulled out the bell boy costume. "Go into the bathroom, change into this innocent garb of toil, and come out and carry my grips downstairs for me. What price that for genius, I ask you?"

His spirits were infectious, and Miriam was almost smiling as she took the uniform, a blond, short-haired wig, and a pair of shoes into the bathroom with her.

In five minutes she was out, amusingly conscious of her slim, blue legs. But she looked remarkably like a fresh-faced young bell hop, rather plump where she had padded out the tunic with towels.

"Fine!" applauded Tony. "You'd pass in a spot light, let alone the shaded, lamp lit lobby. Here, give me your dress." He stuffed it into the trunk, which he locked, strapped, and pasted with his labels.

"Now, forward, march. Can you manage the two grips? I hate like the dickens to make you carry them, but we've got to do this realistically if we expect to get away with it. Ready?"

"We'll go out the side door. Luckily my car isn't parked too near the entrance. Keep a stiff upper lip and we'll manage it."

The walk from the elevator to the entrance, and out to the car, seemed the longest Miriam had ever taken. Her knees were trembling with fear, but she gritted her teeth and went on.

At the entrance, Tony was stopped for a moment's explanation, but the bluecoat at the door never gave a second glance to the little bell hop with the dress suit cases bumping against his legs. Tony stowed the grips in the back, stepped on the starter, and threw the car into gear.

"Now, quick!" he cried. "Hop in, and crouch down on the floor board." They were off.

Turning into a bypath in Central Park, Tony stopped the engine, and turned to Miriam.

"Now, I think we'd better talk ways and means before this excursion goes any farther," he said. "Have you thought anything out yet?"

"Only that I can't go back," said she determinedly. "You may think me silly and exaggerated, but you don't know my people."

"As you say, this awful thing is bound to be in to-morrow's papers, and Emily would only have to say one word to have the police rushing to the house with questions and perhaps worse.

"I expect even Pillsby will come forward and volunteer that he made the Crimson Girl costume, as soon as he hears about it, and he knows me by sight.

"I tell you, I just can't face it. I won't stay in New York, and live a life of terror, for fear that any time I go out I might come face to face with him and be recognized."

"But flight, my dear girl, simply puts you in a false position. It implies guilt, and sooner or later—"

"People have dropped out of sight before and never been found."

"Not Granite Hathaway's daughter. He'll spend a fortune in having you traced. Your picture will be published through the whole country, and there won't be a village too small to have its constable on the lookout for you.

"I'm afraid it won't do. Much better let me take you home, and take your stand with your parents—and their influence—behind you."

"But don't you see, it's my parents I can't face; I tell you, I'd rather die than go back after this," she finished passionately.

"Then what's the alternative? What can I do to help you?" For the first time Miriam roused herself from her own troubles to a realization of Tony's position. She turned to him with a lovely melting smile.

"How selfish and horrid you must think me," she cried, self-reproachfully. "But I do realize how wonderful you've been. I can't even begin to thank you."

Tony flushed, and in the darkness his hitherto untouched heart began to pound. This beautiful, helpless creature thought him "wonderful!"

"Don't try," he said rather gruffly to hide his feelings. "I've done nothing that any chap in his senses wouldn't do."

"Most people wouldn't have believed my cock and bull story," she replied. "They'd have turned me over to the police and washed their hands of me."

"Well, this sort of talk's no good," he said. "We've got to arrange something. You can't go wandering over the country in a bell hop's uniform, with no money, and

no plans. You really must buck up and tell me what the next step is."

"I—I hardly know. What do you think?" A delicious glow suffused Tony at her appeal to his strength and wisdom. He thought for a moment or two, and then spoke.

"Do you want to leave it to me? Will you trust me completely?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Well, then, listen. We'll drive all night, just as I planned.

"In the morning I'll buy you an outfit at the first town we strike, and you can change into it somewhere on the road—somehow," he added, embarrassed.

"And I'll make an attempt at bobbing your hair; that'll change you a bit. Then we'll drive on to Chicago. I'll separate from you there, and give you the name of a theatrical boarding house where you're to rent a room.

"The next day, come to the stage door of the Karrick Theater, and I'll see that you get taken on in the chorus. You must let me stake you until you begin to earn money—just let it be a loan."

Miriam laid a small hand on his for an instant.

"How kind you are!" she said with tears in her voice. "I wonder if ever a girl in trouble had such luck!"

Tony quivered from head to foot.

VII

DALY and Inspector Collins were closeted at headquarters. It was two o'clock when the detective concluded his report.

"I had to let 'em go," he said. "You can't lock up six hundred people. We've got all names and addresses."

"Yes, I see that," nodded the inspector. "And your men found no trace of this Crimson Girl either in the hotel or trying to make a get-away."

"Not a trace. I myself went through all the rooms off the fire escape, and Hanley and Morris went through the rest just to make sure she didn't slip across the corridor and hide in an inner room.

"And the cordon was around the place within five minutes. She couldn't have got out unless she had wings."

"Well, you've done all you could. Now, unofficially, Dan, what's your own idea?"

"My own idea is this: Rush La Rue was Vera Astare's lover. Everybody knows that. She's playing 'The Crimson Girl,'

and Rush La Rue danced all night with some one in a Crimson Girl costume.

"I've questioned several guests, and some say the Crimson Girl at the ball might have been Astore—same build and general effect—and some say they're sure it wasn't."

"Why were they so sure it wasn't?" put in the inspector.

"The reason gave me a lot to think about."

"What was it?"

"They said that La Rue fell all over himself to make an impression on this girl at the ball—wouldn't let her go, or let any one else dance with her, and acted generally as if he was crazy about her."

"Well, if he was Astore's lover—"

"Was is right. They say he's trying to break with her; tired of her and her tantrums, and that he'd never have made such a fuss over this girl if it had really been Vera Astore."

"Seems pretty muddled to me. No woman's fool enough to kill a man in a costume that every one will recognize on sight."

"I argued that way, too, unless she figured that the very obviousness might throw dust in our eyes. And here's a funny thing. I had all the guests unmask. And she wasn't among 'em. It's the first Art and Artists' Ball she's missed in ten years. That looks mighty queer."

"Fishy enough. Everything doubles back on Astore—murdered man her lover, costume hers, and her absence from the ball. Do you know where she lives, Dan?"

"Yes, she's got a duplex apartment, ground floor and one flight up on Fifty-Fifth Street."

"Suppose you run in there."

"Now?"

"Yes, while the trail is hot." Daly rose.

"Shall I rout her out of bed?"

"Yes. If she is guilty, or at least knows something, she won't be asleep. If she's innocent, she won't know what's happened. Break the news to her abruptly, and see how she takes it."

"Yes, sir," said Daly, and left.

It took him five minutes to get an answer to his ring at Vera's apartment. Then a frightened voice spoke through the closed door.

"Who's dar?"

"The police. Open the door."

The bolt shot back, and a crack of the

door opened. An obviously startled negress in a high-necked flannel nightgown confronted him. Daly pushed his way inside, and said shortly:

"Where's your mistress?"

The woman glared at him.

"Miss Vera? In bed and asleep. What you-all want routin' us out in the middle of the night?"

"Fetch her—no, wait. Where's her room?"

Trembling, Sophia pointed upward to a door on the mezzanine balcony of the apartment.

"You-all never goin' into Miss Vera's bedroom?" she faltered. But Daly brushed past her, and was up the short flight of steps. He knocked loudly on Vera's door, and after a short pause a querulous, muffled voice called:

"Who's there?"

"Miss Astore?" he demanded.

"Who is it? What's the matter?"

"Slip on a bathrobe. I've got to see you."

He gave her a scant two minutes, and opened the door. Vera was sitting up in bed, a chiffon rag of a bedjacket over her silken nightgown.

"This is an outrage!" she cried, as he entered. "I'll call the police!"

"I'm the police," he said with a grim chuckle. "Miss Astore, I must talk to you. I've got some news for you."

"Well?"

"Rush La Rue a friend of yours?"

"We were engaged."

"Well, I'm sorry to tell you that he's—dead. Murdered."

An exhibition of wild grief, mounting to hysterics, followed. Daly followed every word and move with the closest attention, and could not be sure whether Vera Astore was indeed mourning with primitive passion, or giving him the best performance of her life.

He waited until the worst of the storm was over, and then said:

"Miss Astore, I know you'd like to avenge his death—to help us find the murderer."

"Yes, yes. I'll do anything."

"Well, will you answer a few questions, please?"

"Of course. Ask me whatever you like."

"Good. Now, first of all, how did La Rue come to be at this ball without you?"

She cast down her eyes and hesitated. Then she looked straight at Daly with a childlike, candid gaze.

"It's humiliating to have to tell you, but I won't keep anything back. Rush lied to me about the ball. He told me a few days ago that he was called to Louisville, and so couldn't be here for the Art and Artists'.

"I believed him, and said if he didn't go I wouldn't either. And I didn't. And now I find he was there, and went without me."

"And where did you spend the evening?"

"I came straight home from the theater, read for a half hour or so, and went to bed."

"Any witnesses to that?"

"My maid—and perhaps the doorman, although I don't remember if he was in the hall when I came in."

"Now, can you think of any reason why La Rue should have been murdered?"

"N-no, I can't."

"No person who had a grudge against him?"

"No, unless an affair with some other woman." She looked up at him with innocent, appealing eyes. "You see for yourself that I wasn't in his confidence. I can't tell what he may have been doing without my knowledge."

Daly rose.

"Well, thanks for your help. Sorry to have brought the bad news to you."

Her shoulders began to heave at the reminder of her loss, and Daly left the room to the tune of her sobs. Sophia was still outside, and he began abruptly:

"What time did your mistress get in to-night?"

"About half past eleven—soon as de show was over."

"What time was it when she went out again?"

"She never did go out again. Come in and went to bed, 'at's all."

"Sure o' that?"

"Co'se I'se shore. I put her to bed and then went myself."

"Go right to sleep?"

"Who? Me? Reckon I did."

"So your mistress could have gone out again without you knowing it?"

"No, suh. I sleeps in her dressing room, and I'se a very light sleeper. If she all so much as turns round in bed, I wakes."

Daly shrugged, and went to find the

hall man. He remembered Miss Astare's coming in, vaguely, but couldn't swear to it.

"She could have gone in her front door while I was up in the elevator. After eleven there's only one man on duty."

"She could also have gone out without your knowledge?"

"Easy, if I was running the elevator."

Daly returned to headquarters to report.

"Well?" asked Inspector Collins.

Daly recounted his interview with Vera Astare.

"How did it sound to you? Ring true?"

"Yes, and no. She cried real tears, but she turned 'em off like water in a tap when I started questioning her."

"Her alibi's bombproof, that's sure. I guess it's a blind trail."

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"Chief, I went into her bedroom where she was supposedly fast asleep. The first question I asked was, 'Rush La Rue a friend of yours?' and she answered, 'We were engaged.'

"Now, I ask you, chief: if she really was in bed from eleven thirty on, and knew nothing of his death, why did she say, 'We were engaged' instead of 'we are engaged'?"

"H-m. That's a point. Quite a nice one. Clever of you, Daly, to spot it. Stick on her trail. Find out anything you can. This is going to be a big case, and we can't afford to take any chances."

"Leave it to me, chief. I'll hang to her like fly paper."

VIII

THE new world Miriam dropped into was so queer it almost dazed her. The theatrical boarding house, run by "Mother" Winters, a mountainously fat ex-soubrette, buzzed with shop talk of the stage.

Just as Sally Montgomery's society slang had been new to her, so here an alien language assailed her ears.

At mealtimes there was talk of "teams," "big time," "flops and wows," "cold turkey," and "resting." To Miriam it might as well have been Greek.

However, as she kept her mouth shut, and was a good listener, she awakened no suspicions in the good-natured, self-centered crowd at the long dinner table.

Her story that she was a St. Louis ste-

nographer, tired of all day office work, roused no comment, except that she was wise to make the change.

It was a little pathetic to note that these shabby, second-rate, impecunious vaudevillians and chorus girls all brought the devotion of real worshipers to the shrine of Thespis. They ate, drank, slept, and dreamed theater.

They were all kind to the timid, lonely girl, and after a week she began to feel more at home among them than she had ever felt in the big New York house where she was born.

She was soon engaged at the Karrick Theater, and every day she rehearsed with the big chorus, under Tony's direction. Her dancing stood her in good stead; and she was glad of the long hours of work—it helped to keep her from thinking of the nightmare she had left behind.

Every day she read the New York papers, fearing, in breathless suspense, to see her own name in print, connected with the case.

The blow fell at last, about ten days after her flight.

Miss Minturn, panic-stricken at Miriam's disappearance, had cabled to Scotland for her parents. Upon their return, Hathaway had called in the chief of the Missing Persons Bureau.

Foul play or an accident was suspected, and every hospital visited or questioned, without result. Then the house servants were questioned by the headquarters detective, and the chambermaid, Emily, told about the box from Pillsby's.

Armed with a photograph of Miriam, the detective called on Pillsby. He recognized her immediately as the "Miss Smith" who had ordered the "Crimson Girl" costume.

With a gasp of excitement, the detective sprinted down to headquarters. The two sensations of the moment—the La Rue murder, and the Hathaway disappearance—had merged into one tremendous case.

Miriam, locked in her little bedroom, began to tremble so that she could hardly hold the paper. It took her five minutes to nerve herself to go on.

Hathaway, she read, pooh-poohed the police story furiously. He said it was a pack of sensational lies, based on the words of a "lying little nigger," and the vanity of a "man milliner who wants some free advertising."

But, unfortunately, the Pillsby box was discovered in Miriam's wardrobe. That seemed to clinch the argument, though Hathaway stubbornly refused to admit any possibility of Miriam's guilt.

He offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for information leading to her whereabouts, and added that, once she returned, the ridiculous police charges would be refuted and somebody would pay.

The police, too, instituted a nation-wide search for her. A thousand prints of the photograph were broadcasted to all police stations in the country. An official reward of one thousand dollars was posted for the "arrest and capture of Miriam Hathaway, wanted for murder."

As she read the words a cold shudder caught the girl in its grip. She, Miriam Hathaway, the sheltered and protected, wanted for murder! Horrible! It was a crazy dream, a nightmare from which she would soon wake. It couldn't be true.

She lay in her hard little bed, like some small, trapped creature of the forest. For a moment she had an impulse to fling herself out of the window and end it all.

But she was young, and youth is elastic. Reaction set in, and soon she was plucking a bit of comfort out of the fact that the published photograph—the only one of her in existence—was a very poor likeness. It had been taken two years before, and portrayed her in profile, looking down at a book.

She glanced at her bobbed curls in the mirror, and remembering the parted, smoothly drawn down hair of the picture, felt tolerably safe. The mention of a tiny triangular scar on her forehead worried her, but she shrugged and said to herself, "They've got to find and suspect me before they look for the scar, and I don't believe they will."

Rehearsals had been going on as usual, and the revue was taking definite form. Tony began in an adroit way to take notice before other people, of "Trixie Vernon," as Miriam called herself, and managed to make his interest in her appear to date from the rehearsals of the show.

No one suspected that he had ever known her before. After a couple of weeks he began to take her to supper after rehearsal, or walk home with her.

Their meetings were the one spot of comfort in Miriam's days. To Tony she could open her heart, discuss her troubles,

and share her burden. And Tony was so sympathetic and cheering that he always left her with a lighter heart.

She did not dream that he lay awake at night as often as she, fearing the long arm of the law and the power of her father's money to reach out and drag her back into the glare of a horrible publicity.

On one of their walks home along the splendid open stretches of Michigan Boulevard, Miriam turned to him:

"Oh, Tony, why must life be so dreadful? It's such a gorgeous night—I can just feel the spring in the air. And the lake's so exhilarating and fresh—if only—" Her voice trailed to silence.

"I know, dear. Every day's a horror of fear and dodging. Is that it? Listen, Miriam, you must know I love you.

"Marry me and get out of the limelight. It's dangerous for you to appear in the show. Anybody could spot you at any time—while, if you were my wife, you'd meet only a little circle of people who'd never dream you were Miriam Hathaway.

"Say you'll do it, dear. It's the only way."

"Never, never. I'd die rather than drag you any farther into this. Even now, you've got to promise me that if ever I am found, you'll never breathe a word of how you helped me out of the hotel. They'd arrest you, too, if they knew."

Tony laughed.

"Don't worry about me, sweetheart."

"But I do, I do," she cried vehemently. He caught her hand.

"Miriam, darling, does that mean you love me, too?"

Her fingers clung to his.

"It must, I suppose," she said shyly.

"But, oh, Tony, please don't ask me to marry you again. I want to, so much—it'd be like heaven, but I won't let you mix in my awful troubles any further."

Tony, wise in his generation, left it at that, for the present.

Ten days before the opening of the revue, Leila Le Roy, the "vamp" dancer of the show, was hurried to the hospital with an acute attack of appendicitis.

Clark, the Chicago manager, with whom Tony was working, called up the agencies in a frenzy, without success.

Finally he put through a call to New York, and made the wires hum for twenty minutes. He came to Tony with a satisfied grin on his round face.

"Who says results don't count? Who do you think I landed for Le Roy's part? Vera Astore, if you don't mind. 'The Crimson Girl' closed Saturday night, and Gould somehow managed to lure her out to the wilds of Chicago.

"She's leaving to-night, and she'll be here in time for rehearsal day after tomorrow. This'll make the show. She's a big drawing card."

The news affected Tony oddly. Was he to be dogged forever by "Crimson Girls," he wondered? He hated the very phrase, bringing, as it did, such dreadful connotations to Miriam and to himself.

He had a hunch that this queer recurrence of the Crimson Girl, even as an innocent coincidence, was unfortunate. But being a very normal young man, he threw off the notion with a shrug, and went back to work.

Vera arrived at the theater two days later, and created her usual stir, with her imperious air, her Pekingese, her orchids, and her colored maid.

But undeniably she had ability, and soon proved that Clark was right. Her vivid personality and clever dancing held the show together, and augured well for opening night.

Possibly her air of satisfaction with the world would not have been so complete had she known that Captain Dan Daly stepped off the Twentieth Century directly in her wake.

Rehearsals went on, and opening night loomed near. With a sigh of relief, Clark observed that "The Astore" was behaving far better than usual.

Generally her presence in a cast meant any number of temperamental outbursts, of anger, jealousy, or mere pettishness. But Clark was glad to notice that Tony had the knack of smoothing her down, of managing her tactfully, without knuckling under to her.

As the days went by, he understood why. The good-looking young director had caught Vera's fancy. She used every opportunity—and manufactured many—to keep Tony at her side.

She appealed to him for advice in a little girl tone that sat strangely on her imperious personality. She managed to take her lunch hour when he did, and innocently suggested that they lunch together and discuss "stage business" while they ate.

Tony, perforce, had to fall in with the

idea, but had, at least, the satisfaction of seeing that she was a lamb at afternoon rehearsal as a result.

The first signs of storm came one evening when rehearsals were over for the day. She invited Tony to dine with her at the Blackstone, where she was stopping, and Tony politely refused.

"I suppose you've a date with some girl," she pouted.

Tony smiled gravely.

"I certainly have a date," he said.

Vera posted herself where she could see him leave, and watched him depart with a lovely, curly-headed chorus girl. She flushed ominously, and summoned her maid.

"Find out who that girl is," she ordered.

Sophia nodded her woolly head, and said she would inquire discreetly at rehearsal to-morrow.

IX

VERA was hardly prepared for Sophia's news next day. The negress came to her in the wings, and whispered excitedly:

"Miss Vera, honey. I'se gotta talk private wif you. It's awful important."

"What about?" asked Vera with languid interest.

"'Bout that thar Vernon girl of Mr. Gordon's. The one you tole me to find out about." Vera's interest quickened.

"Well?"

"I found out—a heap. Cain't tell you here."

"Come into my dressing room, then," Vera said, leading the way. Sophia looked carefully up and down the hall before closing the door. Then she advanced to Vera in the best manner of stage conspirators, and whispered:

"Miss Vera, that girl's name ain't Trixie Vernon no more'n mine is."

"No? What is it, then?"

"You want I should tell you? Well, that girl's Miriam Hathaway, the missing heiress."

Vera laughed contemptuously.

"You fool!" she said. "She looks no more like the picture published than I do."

"Maybe she don't look like her picture, but she shore looks like herself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I've seen Miss Miriam Hathaway in New York in her own house. My niece Emily works there, and I'd swear this here Vernon girl is Miss Miriam. And,

Miss Vera, they's a ten-thousand-dollar reward for the one who finds her!"

Vera thought fast. All sorts of possibilities began to take shape. "Now, look here, Sophia. Let me manage this. You know they'd never give a stupid old creature like you ten thousand dollars.

"They'd laugh at you, and do you, somehow. Now you let me handle this, and if it really is Miriam Hathaway, I'll see that you get the reward. But we've got to go slow and make absolutely sure of it before we take any steps."

"They's the scar the papers spoke about."

"Yes. Now, I'll manage somehow to investigate that scar business, and I'll let you know. Only not a word to a soul in the meantime."

It was unfortunate that, coming from this conclave, Vera ran into Tony and Miriam in the gloom of the wings, and saw Tony lift the girl's hand to his lips in a quick kiss.

Primeval creature that Vera was, the action fanned her feeling for Tony into a real flame. She felt somewhat as a tiger must when he sees his prey threatened by an alien enemy. During rehearsal she attended strictly to her work, and let Tony alone, but when at six o'clock he dismissed the cast, she approached him.

"I want to see you," she said. "Be at the Blackstone at eight. My room's No. 603."

Tony raised his eyebrows at her tone.

"I'm not quite sure I can make it."

"I advise you to," she retorted, and swept from the stage.

Tony's eyes followed her with a troubled gaze. The certainty, the insolence of her attitude, worried him. With a heart throb, his thought went to Miriam and his fears for her safety. Could Vera—Impossible.

By the wildest stretch of coincidence, Vera Astore could never have known Miriam Hathaway by sight. With a shrug he told himself he was growing morbid. Nevertheless, at eight o'clock, he was knocking at the door of 603.

An exquisite Vera in a most alluring negligee settled him in a big lounging chair, and brought him a high ball. Then she curled up in a graceful heap at his feet, and tilted a provocative face up to his.

"Why do you hate me so?" she demanded daringly.

"My dear Miss Astare, I assure you—"

"Don't assure me, most virtuous young man!" She laughed. "You're going to tell me you hold me in the highest respect and admiration; it's your cue." She leaned against him, and went on caressingly. "Tony, aren't I a bit attractive? Wouldn't it thrill you the least bit to be Vera Astare's—husband?"

Tony flushed a dark red. He had never been so uncomfortable in his life. But he was spared the embarrassment of an answer. The cooling voice went on:

"Tony, if I were your wife, we'd have the same interests, wouldn't we? And the same secrets. And if you knew something you didn't want told, and I knew it, too, why, of course—as your wife—I'd keep my mouth shut."

Tony's blood turned to ice. Refined, torturing blackmail! So his intuition had been right. She did know.

"I—I don't understand a word—" he began to stammer. Vera laughed.

"How stupid of you! Very well, I shall explain in words of one syllable, little boy. Your protégée, Miss Trixie Vernon, is wanted by the New York police for murder.

"She has another name, too. You and I know it, and nobody else. Shall we tell, or shall we give a poor deserving girl a chance? What do you say, Tony?"

Tony rose, and strode up and down the room. There was no use in denial, in pooh-poohing her story. All she had to do was to call on the nearest policeman and point Miriam out to him.

Tony couldn't afford to bluff; Vera held all the aces. He forced a bantering smile and tone.

"I wish I could believe you're in earnest, Vera—I may call you Vera, mayn't I? But no such luck, I suppose."

"How modest it is!" she countered.

"But why on earth—are you serious—about marrying—me?"

"Odd, isn't it?" she laughed. "No accounting for tastes."

"But why?"

"Shall we say I like the name of Gordon, or the color of your ties? Or that I have a fancy to be directed by my husband? Anything you like, Tony. Shall we announce our engagement on Thursday—opening night?"

Tony nodded dumbly. He did not dare to bargain with her or suggest any alter-

native. If he showed unwillingness, she might tell out of spite. He managed to kiss her good night with well-simulated warmth.

X

IN spite of Tony's fears, Vera had been bluffing. She had not been certain that Trixie Vernon was really Miriam Hathaway until the next day, when the dress rehearsal took place.

She made it her business to stand near Miriam, and, as the chorus girls ran off after one of their numbers, she caught Miriam by the hand.

"Come here, you pretty little thing," she said gayly. "Who on earth made you up? You're a mess! Come into my dressing room and I'll do you over. It's a shame to spoil an adorable face like yours."

With cold cream and a soft rag she wiped the rouge from Miriam's unsuspecting face, and proceeded to make her up with practiced hands.

She lifted the curls off her forehead to powder her, and felt with a throb of excitement the tiny triangular scar.

In high good humor she sent Miriam out of the room, with a little playful push. Then she turned to Sophia, who had been pottering about the room.

"Nothing doing, Sophia," she laughed. "Your pipe dream's knocked to pieces. No scar, no heiress."

The old negress stood, a picture of disappointment after Vera left. She had been so sure, so absolutely certain that the girl was Miriam Hathaway. And she had dreamed so vividly of an old age of comfort and security on the investment of the ten thousand dollar reward.

And now this was rudely snatched away from her by a word from her mistress. She sighed deeply, and went on hanging up Vera's scattered garments.

In the wings exciting whispers were exchanged among the cast. Vera had hinted to So-and-so, and So-and-so had told Who's This, and What's His Name had repeated it. Miriam, coming back to her place, caught the tag end of the gossip.

"Astare's hooked Gordon. They're going to announce it after the show to-morrow night."

"My Lord, you're spoofing. Why, he can't bear her. He wouldn't give her a kind look if he could help it. It's Vernon he's stalking."

"It's true, I'm telling you. She told Cappy, and Cappy told me."

"Then all I can say is, she's got something on little Tony. Otherwise he wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole."

Miriam shrank back against the wall, and turned dead white under her skillful make-up. Vera Astore engaged to Tony—her Tony!

It couldn't be true. Tony loved her—Miriam; he couldn't be engaged to Vera. He wouldn't—what had that girl said? "He wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole—" unless, what was the other thing she had said? "She must have something on him."

Her groping, bewildered thoughts centered on that idle phrase; Vera was crazy about him, had tagged after him ever since her arrival. She'd made him get engaged to her because she "had something on him."

And then, like a flash-back in a movie, she saw herself in Vera's dressing room, with Vera's finger tips running over her face, her forehead—carefully, stealthily, searching. Of course! What an unsuspecting little fool she had been!

As if any star was going to the trouble of making up a chorus girl without some real purpose. Vera had somehow happened on the truth, and checked up by getting a good look at the little scar. Vera knew the truth, but she had not told; she was bribed to secrecy, and the bribe was—Tony!

All this came to Miriam in one of the crystal white flashes of intuition that love makes possible. Not for an instant did she doubt Tony, or misunderstand what was, in truth, a cruelly twisted situation between them.

But her heart bled at the thought of this sacrifice, this farcical engagement, this ruin of Tony's hopes and happiness. She clenched her little fists, and set her lips with resolution.

All day long Tony avoided her. She understood, and made it easy for him by keeping out of his way. But she could not help seeing Vera's little intimate pats and squeezes every time she passed Tony.

Tony always smiled and returned them, but after Vera had gone, Miriam could see his knuckles whiten and his muscles tense in his effort for self-control.

Dress rehearsal was over at midnight, and Tony took Vera back to her hotel. In the lobby they came face to face with a

square-shouldered man, chewing on a cigar.

"Miss Astore, isn't it? I'll bet you don't remember me."

A startled look came into Vera's eyes. She opened her lips—and then slowly shook her head.

"No, I'm afraid I don't," she said politely.

"Captain Dan Daly. 'Member the time I routed you out of your beauty sleep when Rush La Rue was killed?"

"Oh—I do. That awful night! Did you ever find the murderer?"

"Not as far as I know. But I'm not on that case any more. Out here on a big bond robbery."

The truth, or duty, was a bagatelle to be juggled with. It seemed to Daly that not one, but both the young people before him, breathed a trifle easier.

He took a second look at Vera's companion, and his sharp blue eyes narrowed. He remembered Tony as the young man who was writing labels at a desk, the night of Rush La Rue's murder. And here he was with Vera Astore.

As the chief had said, "Everything doubles back to her."

"Mr. Gordon, your leading man?" he asked by way of polite conversation.

"Oh, no! 'The director,'" said Vera, and archly, "my *fiancé*."

"That so? Well, I sure congratulate him. Got taste, young man. Ought to go far."

Flattery was the bee line to Vera's heart. Before they separated she had invited Daly to the big party back stage the following night.

Most opening night back stage parties are gay affairs, but Vera's outdid them all. The decorations, the fancy potations, and the vintage of the champagne were superlative.

The show had been a riot, the critics unanimous in praise, and this naturally reflected itself in every one's mood.

An immensely long table spanned the stage with two decorated and bower-hung throne chairs at the head. In them sat Vera, brilliant as a flame in her scarlet chiffon, and Tony, his jaw set in a mechanical smile.

The whole company was invited, and the popping of corks sounded like exploding hand grenades. Laughter, shrieks of gayety and excitement, flowers pelted back

and forth, paper caps donned grotesquely, all added to the noisy abandonment to fun.

Clark, screamingly comic in a Kate Greenaway paper sunbonnet, rose somewhat unsteadily.

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends and fellow-members: It gives me great pleasure on this night of triumph and success, to announce to you the climax of another sort of happiness—the happiness of a—er—happy—union—in short, the union of our two stars—dancing and d'recting.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's drink a little drop to Vera and Tony."

Shouts, waving of hands and glasses, all the meaningless gay noise of crowds, cries of "Speech—" speeches, drinks, toasts, laughter, more speeches followed.

Through it all Tony sat with his fixed, cheerful smile that stabbed Miriam's heart like a sword. She had hated to come. She would have given a year of her life to stay away from this cruel, hateful party, but she was a little thoroughbred, and she would not show the white feather.

She sat calm and smiling, even as Tony did, with the knife in her heart. And then Vera, in her unwise cruelty, gave the knife one twist too much. She rose, and spoke down the length of the table:

"We've heard Clarky, and Pete, and Tony, and Harris, and all the principals, and we're not paying a bit of attention to you girls of the chorus. I want a speech from one of the girls; Trixie Vernon, give us a speech."

It was unheard of, out of place, but it was three o'clock in the morning, and anything went. Miriam flushed, and paled.

She understood the insolent triumph under Vera's sweet tones. And she saw the suppressed fury in Tony's eyes. Her soft lips tightened a trifle, but she rose and began to speak quietly, and with composure:

"Ladies and gentlemen: Miss Astare has asked me to speak to you. I want to thank you all for your kindness to me while I have been here. But I fear my stay with you is ended.

"When I announce to you that my real name is Miriam Hathaway, of New York, you will readily see that I have an urgent engagement elsewhere in about five minutes."

She finished with a dazzling smile, which was the bravest act of her life. Then she turned to Daly, whom some one had pointed out to her.

"I'm ready when you are," she said.

There was a hush, and then an excited buzz at her news. Tony rose from his seat and came to her. Under cover of the noise, she whispered to him:

"Don't look like that, Tony darling! I understood. Did you think I was going to stand by and let you ruin your life to shield me?"

XI

THE spectators in the crowded court room were having the time of their lives. They had followed the trial for four days, now, and each day had been a thrilling act in an engrossing melodrama.

Even the time of year—October—was exactly right, cool enough to bear the stuffiness of the packed room, and early enough to allow them leisure to attend, before the winter season's many functions claimed them.

The audience read like the Social Register; everybody who was anybody was present. Possibly they were not the morbid ghouls they seemed, eager to watch the torture of a young girl on trial; it may have been only natural interest in a drama, where one personally knew the star of the cast.

Everything tended to make the case one of supreme importance. John Hathaway's position in the financial world, his wife's assured place in society, Miriam's youth and beauty, and the sensational events that were brought out.

It was like some gripping but highly improbable movie, her secret excursion to the Art and Artists' Ball, like some modern Cinderella; her wild flight down the fire escape, her daring intrusion into a strange room, there to be hidden by a gallant young chevalier—society rustled with interest when he proved to be old Anthony Gordon's delightful son—her escape from the hotel under the very eyes of the law in the bell hop's uniform, and on to the startling dénouement at the first night party, where she revealed her identity to save her lover from sacrificing himself for her sake.

District Attorney Strang had a flair for the dramatic, and as witness after witness took the stand, a vivid picture of the events of the fatal night took shape.

Horace Butterfield, perhaps the greatest criminal lawyer in America, cross-examined the prosecution witnesses, harried them, hectorated them, badgered them, and yet was

unable to shake their testimony a jot. It looked exceedingly black for the defendant.

The audience debated at lunch as to what punishment would be meted out by the jury, self-defense and an acquittal, first or second degree manslaughter, with a long, long stretch in prison, or the hair raising possibility of murder and the chair.

That Miriam was guilty and rightfully on trial no one in the court room doubted for an instant.

On the fifth day, Butterfield did a delicate and precarious thing; he put Miriam on the stand. The audience rustled with renewed interest. This was something like; they were going to hear the star as well as see her.

Miriam was pale, but her pansy-blue eyes were steadfast and childlike as she answered Butterfield's gentle, kindly questions. He brought her up to the scene with Rush La Rue in the little room.

"And then, Miss Hathaway?"

"He tried to kiss me."

"You repulsed him?"

"Yes. But he seized me. He was fearfully strong. I think he had been drinking. I wrenched free, and drew the dagger that was part of my costume."

"Why did you do that?"

"I was terrified. I thought it might frighten him into behaving. I never gave it a thought as a real weapon; I didn't even know if it was sharp or not."

"What happened then?"

"He laughed, and turned my wrist until I had to drop the dagger. He had his back to the curtains, but I was facing them; and just at that instant the curtains parted a little, and there was a movement—a hand, I think—and La Rue fell forward at my feet.

"I was panic-stricken. I wanted to get away, not only from him, from the ball; I suddenly realized what a dreadful thing I'd done to come at all."

Some one from back in the court laughed—a cynical, incredulous laugh. The judge rapped smartly with his gavel, Miriam flushed a deep, painful red, and Butterfield bit his lip with annoyance. And then suddenly there came hysterical cries from somewhere in the big room.

"You-all kin laugh; you-all believe they's nothin' but lies she's sayin'. But it's true; it's true! I know, 'cause I seen it all. And I wanna tell it and get it off ma soul."

Pandemonium reigned. Two court officers tried to drag the old negress out; but she struggled and screamed until the judge ordered her to the stand, and of course discovered her identity as the maid of Miss Vera Astare.

"Judge, I swear I's tellin' de truf—just listen a minute. Every word she say, 'at's the way it happened.

"I was dere, too, behind de curtain, and I see Miss Vera lean forward slow and creepy, and jab Mista La Rue right in de back!

"'Nen she-all stick de dagger in de pocket of her domino, and 'nen she scream, and 'nen she step out in de ballroom, and join ebervbody, and dey all run to de lil room; and nobody knew who screamed first.

"I was scared out o' my wits, and I was down in de back stairs 'fore she eber let out de first scream, and I run home fast as mah ole laigs could run, and when Miss Vera come in, she peeked in at me, and dere I wuz, my eyes shut tighter 'n a drum, covered up in bed wid all mah clothes on."

Judge Eldridge leaned forward amid the tense silence. "And how did you happen to be at the ball?"

"Must 'a' been twelve o'clock that night when I hears Miss Vera potterin' round her room.

"I sleeps in her dressin' room; an' I ups an' takes a peek, an' I sees her all dressed in one of these dominos, and they's a knife in her hands—the lil sharp Indian knife Mista La Rue give her for cuttin' letters wiv, and she feels de edge of it wiv her finger; nuf to gib a nigger de creeps, and 'nen she sneaks outer de door quick, and gits a taxi at de corner.

"I knows whar she is goin'. I knows all 'bout de Artists' Ball, and I goes plumb after her, 'cause I's scared what she-all might do.

"And dey lets me right up when I tells how I's cloak assistant, and 'nen I sees Miss Vera behind de curtains, and before I can wink, she done stab Mista La Rue daid.

"Judge, I's only a pore, ignorant ole colored lady, and I loved Miss Vera till she lied to me 'bout that 'ere scar, and did me outer de reward. I knows I wuz wrong to keep de secret, and my conscience tell me so eberv night, till at last I decided shore to-day I'd tell you-all, and I has."

The most blasé spectator got his thrill—even to the superb insolence of Vera As-tare's confession:

"It's true; I killed him, and I'm glad I did. He lied to me and betrayed me, and he didn't deserve to live."

The reporters and "sob-sisters" sharpened new pencils. Vera would prove a much more colorful defendant than the rather aloof Miss Hathaway. And it was

dead certain Vera would get off—unwritten law, or justification, or emotional insanity. And another big sensational trial was in view!

In Judge Eldridge's chambers, Tony swept Miriam into his arms, regardless of her parents or Butterfield.

"Miriam, darling, say when you'll marry me. And I'll go out and nail that blessed old colored lady to be your maid."

THE END

White Faith

THIS PRIMITIVE MAN, LOST IN THE MAZE OF CIVILIZED JUSTICE, FINDS A COMPASS IN HIS SOUL

By Douglas Durkin

EARLY in the morning the north wind had unleashed its white fury upon a world of frozen tundra and measureless snows. Noon had passed in a gray shroud. Deep dusk had rushed down in a black smother that covered the headlands and blotted the world from view.

Night overtook Ka-no-hos, the Loucheux, on the brink of a small lake whose margin was densely lined with willows. It had been a long day for Ka-no-hos, a day of stubborn struggle with an adversary that had beaten upon him without mercy, that had blinded him with sudden gusts of fine snow, that had stung and cut his cheeks and sucked the very breath out of his throat.

At least two more such days must pass before he should come to the shores of the great river where stood the white man's village, the company's post and the dour-faced trader, and the little white mission with its acre for the silent dead. Two days it would be, perhaps more, before he should grasp the hand of the good father and tell him why he had come all the long miles that lay between his cabin and Fort MacPherson.

They would think it strange—the trader and the good father—when they saw Ka-no-hos trudging up the river by himself

and dragging his heavily laden sled behind him in the snow.

But Ka-no-hos thought little of that. He had seen much of the white men who lived at the fort, and of the other white men who came there each year at the end of June, stayed a little while, and went back south again to a land that was strange to Ka-no-hos. He had found them good men for the most part, but none so good as the white-haired father who always smiled and shook hands with you, as if you were his best friend, and asked you to come in and talk awhile before you took the trail again.

Whatever they might think of his coming alone and dragging his sled behind him mattered very little. They would hail him heartily, no matter how he came, and receive him kindly.

Besides, he would tell them why his brother was not walking with him in the trail and his dogs were no longer straining in their harness.

He paused behind a shelter of stout willows, and rested before striking out across the wind-swept level of the lake.

It was a long time now since Ka-no-hos had felt anything akin to fear. He was born of a race of men who have small place for so unworthy a sentiment.

And yet, the task that lay before him—that of crossing the lake in almost total darkness with the snow-laden wind contesting every yard of his journey—challenged the last reserves of his stout heart. It was not that Ka-no-hos had ever feared death, let it come in whatever guise it chose.

But a fear had lingered with him all day that had chilled him more than the icy wind had done. It was the fear that death might overtake him before he could reach the little white mission on the great river, before he could come to the kindly father with his burden—and with the grief that had lain so heavily on his heart since the night before.

On the sled that he had dragged behind him all day lay the lifeless form of his only brother.

II

THE fear of failure stirred Ka-no-hos to instant action. He dropped down to the level of the lake and bent low as he fought his way against the wind.

He was not a big man, not nearly so big as the company trader at the post who, in turn, was somewhat smaller than the red-coated sergeant who lived in the village and made long journeys toward the arctic and into the great mountains to the west.

Ka-no-hos was short and sturdy, as are all the Loucheux, with stout limbs and muscles of steel. Years of testing himself against the ruthless forces of the wilderness had given him experiences that had made even the red-coated sergeant marvel to hear of them, and Ka-no-hos was still a young man.

But it took all his stoutness of heart and all the close-knit endurance of his body to bring him safely to the farther shore of the lake that night. And when he groped his way at last to the shelter of an old deserted cabin in which he had spent the night on many another journey to the post, Ka-no-hos was like a belabored animal crawling into cover.

For some time he lay in one corner of the cabin until he had regained sufficient strength to enable him to make a fire and prepare his meager supper. Then he went about his task with the sure economy of one long used to life on the trail.

A log that had fallen from its place in one of the walls provided him with the necessary fuel. He dragged his sled into the

shelter and unleashed a small ax. In a few moments he had a comfortable blaze crackling in the center of the cabin where he had cleared away the drifted snow from the frozen ground that was the floor.

Then he moved his loaded sled back against the wall where the dancing shadows played upon it so that it seemed to stir with life. Ka-no-hos watched it for awhile as if he were not quite sure that the moving shadows were playing him a heartless joke, then stooped and lifted a small box from the back of the sled.

When he had carried it to the fire he took from it a small pail, smoke incrusting, and a frozen fish such as white trappers feed to their hungry dogs on the trail. There was nothing more to his meal than this, except the pint of strong tea he brewed in the same vessel he had used to boil the fish.

But Ka-no-hos was content. He had the warm comfort of his pipe when the meal was finished and the fire was flickering down slowly for want of fuel.

It was then that he drew from an inner pocket a small bundle wrapped in canvas and unwound it slowly, almost tenderly. When he had set the wrappings aside he held in his hands a little book which he opened reverently as he stooped close to the light from the fire.

Clearing his voice, he began to read aloud. The page from which he read was printed in syllabic characters, and the words he intoned were in his own tongue.

The message the words unfolded had been spoken first in a language Ka-no-hos had never heard, and so long ago that he had found it difficult to believe that even the world could be so old. But the good father at the mission had told him many things that had been hard to believe.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Ka-no-hos had need of comforting. He found solace in the words. It was as if something had given them a mystic power.

He read on, his voice rising at last above the voice of the storm. Soon he began to sway back and forth to the rhythm of his own words.

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you—

Beyond the crumbling walls and above the broken roof the grim hosts of death

raced down the wind and tore southward over lake and river, and through the long miles of groaning forests where life was hidden away in fear. Within the shelter the man's crouching figure cast a mammoth shadow upward along the wall and halfway across the roof above.

Against the far wall the still form lay enveloped in gloom, the delicate mockery of light and shadow no longer lending it the cruel semblance of life.

Blessed are ye—

III

KA-NO-HOS paused abruptly and drew himself up to listen. The wind, that knew nothing of what passes in the hearts of men, had brought to his ears a cry that was not its own.

As he listened the cry came once more and he sprang to his feet, letting the book fall to the ground. In the doorway of the cabin he paused for only a moment, thrusting his head forward and to one side as his senses strained to catch once more the cry that had come to him on the wind.

When it came at last, he plunged into the outer darkness and met the challenge of the storm.

When he came again and stood in the doorway of the cabin, Ka-no-hos was not alone. Behind him came a man whose great shoulders and massive head towered above the sturdy little Loucheux, so that he seemed very small in the pale light from the dying fire.

"You will sit down," Ka-no-hos invited as he stepped aside and motioned the stranger to a place beside the fire.

The man limped to the center of the room, swung his pack from his broad shoulders, and squatted on the ground beside the heap of glowing embers from the center of which a single tongue of yellow flame fluttered fitfully.

Ka-no-hos gave the stranger's face one searching glance. It was not a pleasant sight. The eyes were rimmed with red. The cheeks were puffed and blue. The thick lips were broken from exposure to the wind and the frost.

Of these things Ka-no-hos appeared to take little account. Had there been need of learning what he must do, the good father at the mission would have taught him long ago. But Ka-no-hos knew.

He set about hurriedly to bring back his fire. Once more he drew from his box the

smoke-incrusted pail, the frozen fish, the small tin that held his little store of tea.

Had there been more than these he would have proudly set them before the stranger. As it was he proffered his simple fare in a manner befitting one who had grown inured to hard living.

"It is all I have," he said.

The stranger took the food without a word and hungrily fell to eating. It was apparent that he was not aware of what he was swallowing.

Presently, when Ka-no-hos had brewed a pint of strong tea, the man drank it noisily in great gulps. Then he set the pail aside and drew the back of one hand slowly across his broken lips.

A moment later he lifted his red eyes to Ka-no-hos where he sat on the opposite side of the fire, his fingers caressing the warm bowl of his pipe. The look from those eyes caused Ka-no-hos suddenly to think of the knife he wore at his belt.

Through the mind of the Loucheux ran a strange thought. Here was a man who was of another world. The little white father, the dour-faced trader, even the red-coated sergeant were, after a fashion, men of his own world, of the world that Ka-no-hos knew.

But this stranger who had come in out of the storm was not one of them. Somewhere beyond the endless miles that lay to the south was a race of strange men whose ways were inscrutable, whose very hearts were unlike the simple heart of Ka-no-hos. Here was one of them who had lost his way.

"Damn it to hell!" the stranger roared.

Ka-no-hos leaped to his feet like a startled lynx. He could not understand why the man began to laugh then, a great bellying like the trumpeting of a bull walrus.

Nor did he understand why the man spoke not another word that night. Only he was careful, after he had huddled in his fur robe and stretched himself beside his sled in the corner of the cabin, not to close his eyes until he had seen the stranger unfold his pack and lie down beside the fire. Even then the Loucheux slept lightly, his senses sentineling him throughout the night while the stranger moaned in his sleep.

IV

IN the early morning, Ka-no-hos stole from his robe and set about building the fire and boiling the melted snow. And as

he worked quietly, the man from the other world slept heavily. When he awoke finally it was with a sudden, startled movement as if he had come out of a troubled dream, muttering profanely to himself.

Together they ate the food that Ka-no-hos had prepared. And when they had eaten, the stranger lifted his red-rimmed eyes and looked at the Loucheux across the fire.

"How far to MacPherson, mate?" he asked, his voice grown comparatively gentle now.

"Two days," Ka-no-hos replied. "I go there."

"Dogs?"

"No. Dogs dead."

"God Almighty! Two more days of this!"

There was no more to that conversation. The end of another half hour found them on the trail, Ka-no-hos leading the way, the stranger plodding along behind the sled. With the coming of dawn the storm abated somewhat, and by noon of the brief day the air had cleared so that the flying clouds were visible overhead. There was a pale glow of starlight when they made their camp that night on the shore of a small river with wooded shores.

Ka-no-hos skirted the shore until he found dry wood for the fire. Returning, he caught a glimpse of the stranger who was stooping above the sled where Ka-no-hos had left it standing beside a spruce tree. The sight disturbed him, but he made his way quickly to the spot he had chosen for their camp and began building his fire without more than a casual glance for the man who had drawn back on his approach.

Once more Ka-no-hos followed the simple round of his duties in complete silence, his guest watching him from where he sat beside the fire. Once more their supper of boiled fish and strong tea was devoured. And once more, when they had finished eating, the stranger looked across the fire at Ka-no-hos, his red-rimmed eyes burning evilly.

"God Almighty, mate, I didn't figure on cruising with a ghost!" he bellowed. "Can't you talk about something? I thought I left the dead men all behind me—up there on the Beaufort."

Something in the man's manner prompted Ka-no-hos to make some sort of rejoinder.

"You catch whale?" he ventured.

"The San Carlos, out of Frisco, mate. Two-hundred-ton whaler. Thirty-four men when we started. Only one left now. That's me."

"Men die?"

For several seconds the man's roaring laugh was the only reply to the question Ka-no-hos asked. His laughter ceased abruptly, however, and he leaned across the fire so that the red light burned full upon his broken lips and his terrible eyes.

"All dead on the decks—all except Gus Fream. That's me. Gus Fream—second mate. Dead of scurvy and flu and God knows what! Lying out stiff on the decks, mate, where you couldn't move without stepping on 'em. And the old hulk dead herself—froze hard with her bows stove in and half her rigging hanging over the sides. When I couldn't stand it any longer without going off my head, I left 'em there and started down. And by the living God, mate, they followed me! First one and then another till I got to thinking I was dead—and me on my feet. Then the storm hit, and they kind of sloughed off in the smother."

The sailor man ceased speaking, yawned, closed his eyes slowly, and bowed his head as if he were falling asleep. After a long silence he sat up with a jerk, turned his head in an attitude of listening, and sat thus for several seconds.

Ka-no-hos, watching him, could think only of what a strange world that must be out of which his companion had come months before when he had left for the northern seas. What an unlovely world if there were many there like this man who sat facing him across the fire!

His first impulse had been one of simple pity for the survivor who had lived to see his friends dropping dead about him until he alone was left. Presently, however, the Loucheux's feeling changed.

He began to wonder whether the man had been telling him the truth about his companions who lay dead on the decks up there beyond the farthest reach of land. There was something in those red-rimmed eyes that destroyed pity in the beholder, something that bespoke the brute and forced one instinctively to beware.

V

At the end of an hour the two men still sat facing each other on opposite sides of

the little fire. The big sailor had not moved from his place since he had finished his story of the fate of the *San Carlos*.

He sat hunched forward, his hands folded before him, his eyes staring steadily into the face of the sturdy little Loucheux. His heavy jaws had set brutally, and only a light sneer of contempt disturbed occasionally the blank immobility of his countenance.

Ka-no-hos had returned that stare without flinching. There was little in his outward appearance to indicate that he had changed greatly in his mental attitude the past hour or so.

As occasion demanded, he bent to put fresh fuel on the fire in a manner quite as casual as if he had been sitting there alone. His fingers caressed the bowl of his pipe thoughtfully as the thin smoke left his lips and drifted away on the frosty air.

But his small dark eyes had lost their look of pity. They were cold, instead, with almost savage cunning.

Ka-no-hos never permitted his thoughts to stray from the man before him, save when his mind wandered to where the still form lay wrapped on the sled that stood back among the shadows. Vaguely, too, he recalled the one desire that had burned in his heart for three days, that his brother should sleep on holy ground where slept those who had lived in the faith of the white man.

It was this desire that had brought him over the long miles of wilderness trail and had given him strength to battle against the storm. And it was because of this desire that he sat there now, fearless as he was watchful, his muscles tensed and ready.

The sailor shifted uneasily.

"Ain't we going to turn in mate?" he asked in a colorless voice.

"Mebbe so," Ka-no-hos replied in much the same tone. "You turn in."

The suggestion was met with silence. Neither man moved. The sailor settled down heavily, his red eyes staring as before, his folded hands twitching a little where they hung between his widespread knees.

Ka-no-hos smoked placidly, the fingers of one hand curved affectionately about his pipe, his dark eyes unwavering. And about the two men the white world lay steeped in the pale glimmer of the stars.

Night wore on, and neither moved from

his place. Nor did either speak again to suggest that they should take advantage of the few remaining hours to refresh themselves for the wearisome journey that lay ahead.

Some time after midnight the sailor drew his feet under him and sat up stiffly. He looked into the fire, spat at it, then laughed softly to himself.

"Why ain't you rolling in, mate?" he asked.

"I wait for you," Ka-no-hos replied.

The sailor laughed boisterously. Then he leaned toward the Loucheux.

"Listen to me," he said. "I know why you don't turn in. You're afraid to lie down. You're afraid to take your damn black eyes off me!"

"I am not afraid," Ka-no-hos declared evenly.

"Yes, you are! I know it. What's more, you got a damn good reason for being scared. I been waiting here to kill you, and you know it!"

"Yes, I know," Ka-no-hos admitted, "but I am not afraid."

The sailor narrowed his red eyes and regarded the smaller man appraisingly.

"Nerve like yours, friend, ought to count for something," he muttered to himself. "And damn if it doesn't, too! I'll make a bargain with you. How many pelts you got there in that load of yours?"

"Five fox," Ka-no-hos replied.

The sailor thrust his face forward so that the light from the fire threw black shadows upward over his eyes.

"Don't lie to Gus Fream, mate!" he warned. "I asked how many."

"Five fox," Ka-no-hos repeated.

"Five fox—and what else?"

Ka-no-hos drew his feet slowly under him before he replied.

"Five fox—and my brother," he said.

The sailor regarded him for a moment before he understood. Then he started violently.

"What?"

The word was a shriek.

"My brother," Ka-no-hos repeated. "He is dead!"

The sailor's face became a mask of horror. He spoke slowly from between clenched teeth.

"You tell me I slept last night—and traveled all day with—" His voice failed him, and he got to his feet slowly without taking his eyes from the face of Ka-no-hos.

He reached for the knife in his belt. "Why—damn you—I'll cut your heart out for that—and his, too!"

In his blind rage he did not see the knife that had leaped into the right hand of the Loucheux, its keen blade lying along the palm. He was too utterly blind to understand why Ka-no-hos waited where he stood a few feet back from the fire, his sturdy little body poised, his dark eyes measuring coldly the distance that separated them.

The sailor probably did not see the upward dart of the hand that sent the knife singing through the frosty air. Even then, with the blade buried deep at the base of his throat, he lunged heavily forward so that Ka-no-hos had to leap aside to avoid his rush. Then he pitched grotesquely, face downward, into the deep snow.

Ka-no-hos had only a glimpse of him lying there as he stepped quickly to the sled, picked up the hauling strap, and set off along the starlit trail.

VI

It was a simple story, tragic though it was, that Ka-no-hos told to the little father at the mission house late the following day. Only a week ago his brother had been driving across a small lake when the dogs had suddenly disappeared through the thin ice.

The brother had been thrown into the icy water, and had arrived at the cabin three hours later, half dead from exposure to the biting wind. Two days he had lingered. Then he had died. But death is nothing. It comes to all.

Ka-no-hos wished only that he might have a little space of holy ground in which to lay his brother—large enough to hold Ka-no-hos, too, if that was not too much to ask, when he should come to the long sleep.

He had spoken throughout in his own tongue, but the kindly father understood, and smiled, albeit a little sadly, and gave his hand once more to Ka-no-hos. All should be as he had asked. It would be done.

But there was something more. Ka-no-hos hesitated.

"What is it, Ka-no-hos?" the old priest asked.

Again Ka-no-hos began in his own tongue.

"It is wrong to kill. Is that not true?"

"It is so written, my son."

The Loucheux was thoughtful for a moment.

"That is the law of the white man," he observed presently.

"It is God's law, too, Ka-no-hos."

"But God loves?"

"Loves—and forgives, if we confess and ask him to forgive."

"The white man never forgives."

The little father was perplexed for a moment. Finally he found a reply.

"The white man—judges."

"God does not judge, then?"

"He is the Merciful Judge."

For a long time, then, there was silence between the two. Ka-no-hos was thinking of the strange case of one, On-ya-tuk, an Eskimo who had killed a hated enemy for the wrong he had done him.

The red-coated sergeant had taken On-ya-tuk away in the spring. They had traveled many days to the southward. The red-coated sergeant had come back, but On-ya-tuk had never returned.

On-ya-tuk would never return. He had given himself up to be tried by the white men who judge, the white men who judge without mercy.

Ka-no-hos had thought about that for many days after he had heard the story. Didn't it say somewhere in that little book the father had given him that we must not judge one another? The white men had forgotten that.

But On-ya-tuk should not have forgotten. On-ya-tuk had been a fool. He should have chosen rather to go before the Great Judge of all mankind, the Judge of Mercy. A man could manage that—if he only thought of it before it was too late.

"Why do you ask me all this, Ka-no-hos?" the little father broke in finally.

Ka-no-hos looked steadily from his deep eyes. He had known from the very first that he would tell the old priest the whole truth about what he had done.

"I tell you," he said evenly, "because—I have killed."

"My son!"

"He lies in the snow—one day from here."

Then Ka-no-hos told all that he had done.

When he was through with his story, the little father sighed heavily.

"You must tell all this to the sergeant, Ka-no-hos," he said finally.

Ka-no-hos bowed his head. He had not

forgotten that he would have to do that. He would come to that directly.

"Yes," he said. "But first—my brother."

Together they left the house and walked to one corner of the little acre of frozen ground marked with its wooden crosses that stood, lean looking and stark, above the unbroken snow.

The good father knew what must be done. He set about it quickly, Ka-no-hos helping him. At last, when night was closing about them, the old man read a brief prayer in a voice that trembled strangely with emotion.

Ka-no-hos stood opposite him, his sturdy frame swaying a little, his head bared to the frosty air, his face betraying nothing of what he must have felt in his heart. He only muttered to himself for a moment after the prayer was finished.

Then he set himself to the task of moving the brown earth back into place. When he had shaped the dark mound with his spade he turned to the little father.

"Now," he said quietly, "I go."

"We'll go together, my son," the old priest decided.

VII

THE law of the white man is a very simple thing in the north country. The little father and Ka-no-hos went directly to the detachment headquarters where they found the red-coated sergeant, smoking his pipe in company with the sergeant from Point Barrow who had come down to MacPherson two days before.

Strange, silent men, these wearers of the scarlet tunic, who went about their business without a word to any one to account for their sudden arrivals or their unannounced departures.

The little father sat apart, unspeaking, while Ka-no-hos told his story. There followed several minutes of heavy silence while the sergeant wrote a record in a big book.

When that was done, Ka-no-hos was led away and locked securely in the steel cage that stood in the back room of the detachment headquarters. The little father lingered for half an hour or so to talk over the case with the two sergeants.

In the morning Ka-no-hos would go back along the trail to show where the body of the stranger lay in the snow. After that there would be a preliminary exami-

nation—then a wait of weeks until the river was open to the south—then the slow journey to Edmonton, where Ka-no-hos would tell his story once more, this time before the white judge who had, once before, heard the Eskimo, On-ya-tuk, tell his story.

It was a very simple thing, this law of the white man in a country where there were no bickering lawyers to confuse the issue with their arguments. Nevertheless, the good father went back to his warm cottage beside the little church, his heart very heavy within him, his mind sorely troubled.

Most of the night, too, he lay awake thinking of Ka-no-hos, whose zeal and whose love for a brother had made him a transgressor before the law. There was something here that called for a higher justice than that dispensed by the white man—a justice whose eyes might be unbound so that she could look for a moment into the heart.

Late the next morning the little father walked down to the post to talk with his friend, the trader. He might find some solace in talking to the old Scot who was the company factor. At any rate, there was nothing he could do now until the sergeant returned with Ka-no-hos and the body of the man he had slain somewhere along the trail.

When they had exchanged greetings, the trader took from his pocket a crumpled bit of paper and handed it to the little father.

"This is for you," he said; "this and the five pelts you see there on the wall."

"For me?"

"Aye—from the Loucheux."

The old priest smoothed out the paper and ran his eyes slowly over a straggling row of symbols that had been crudely penciled across it. It was written in the same syllabic script that Ka-no-hos had learned to read in the little black book the father had given him. It read:

Pray for Ka-no-hos. I do not come again. I go to the Great Judge. Let Him judge in mercy. I am not afraid. Pray for Ka-no-hos.

The little father looked up quickly and found the trader's eyes upon him. Suddenly the full meaning of the message came apparent. An exclamation of alarm escaped him.

"What ails ye now?" the trader demanded.

"Where is he?" the little father asked.

"Who, man?"

"Ka-no-hos, the Loucheux? Did he go with the sergeant?"

"Hours ago—him and the two redcoats. They'll be halfway there by now, like enough, from what they told me of where they were going. What ails ye?"

The little father was perplexed. Was this the reason, then, that Ka-no-hos had asked him about the Great Judge, the God who judges in mercy? He might have known! He should have known that Ka-no-hos would choose death by his own hand rather than suffer the fate of On-ya-tuk.

For a moment he hesitated, nursing the hope that the sergeant would bring Ka-no-hos back safely with him. But it was only for a moment.

He knew the grim resolve in the heart of the Loucheux would be carried out as soon as he had done his duty. The sergeants, unsuspecting, would relax their vigilance for a moment—and Ka-no-hos would be forever beyond the reach of the law of the white man.

The little father told the trader the meaning of the message on the crumpled paper, then abruptly announced his decision. He must have the trader's team of powerful dogs. He must take the trail at once in pursuit of the sergeants.

They were all of four hours ahead of him, but they would be traveling without haste. There would still be a chance of overtaking them before they had come to the end of their outward journey.

Ka-no-hos must not do this thing. A man must not take his own life, even to escape the injustice that awaited him at the hands of others.

Within half an hour the little father was in the trail with the trader's team, urging the dogs forward in the tracks that had been made by the men who had gone ahead that morning. In the faint light of midday he drove the team eastward from the river, and struck into the wilderness beyond, praying for Ka-no-hos, praying for himself, and for the dumb brutes that plunged forward under the sting of the lash.

VIII

THREE men huddled in their blankets in the dancing light from a small fire they had built on the shore of a wind swept lake. Two of them—Ka-no-hos and the

sergeant from MacPherson, lay close beside each other in the attitude of men asleep.

The other—the redcoat from Point Barrow—sat hunched forward, his face to the fire he had just tended afresh, his back against a snowshoe stuck upright in the snow.

From where he lay, Ka-no-hos, feigning sleep, kept his half open eyes fixed upon the man seated beside the fire. For hours he had watched him as the sergeant walked about to gather fuel for the fire and busied himself to keep back the sleepy feeling that assailed him every time he sat down.

More than once Ka-no-hos had seen the sergeant steal quietly across and stand beside him for a moment, then lean over to assure himself that the Loucheux was asleep. But always Ka-no-hos had kept every sense alert, waiting for some small chance to favor him, praying that somehow a merciful God might cause the watchful sergeants to relax their vigilance, if only for one precious minute.

He had told them, before they had made camp that night, where they might find what they sought. Farther along the trail it was—across the lake—over a ridge—through a small valley beyond—perhaps another ten miles—and the trail was well marked in the recent snow.

They would find their way now without his aid. He had done his duty by them. There was nothing left but to carry out his own grim resolve, to save himself the shame that had befallen On-ya-tuk, the foolish one.

His heart quickened when he saw the sergeant seat himself at last before the fire, his blanket drawn snugly about him, his head drooping slowly forward.

For a long time, then, the Loucheux waited, his eyes wide open now to count the stars that burned against the deep blue of the night that hung above them. Presently he moved a little to try the effect upon the sleeper before the fire.

The sergeant started suddenly, lifted his head quickly, and cast a searching glance toward the forms lying together in the snow. Ka-no-hos watched him narrowly through his small eyes.

It was not long before the sergeant drew his blanket more closely about him and settled himself against the snowshoe at his back. In a few moments his breathing became even and heavy.

Still Ka-no-hos waited, counting the stars—waited an eternity, it seemed, while the fire burned ever lower and lower until nothing but a few glowing embers were left. Noiselessly, then, he moved the blanket from about his limbs, fold after fold.

Once on his feet, he knew what he would do; he had been thinking about it for hours. They might awaken in time to act before he could escape—but they would not take him alive.

They might kill him before he had gone a dozen paces. They had done such things before. But what would that matter? They could answer for their own deeds. He was concerned with them no more.

He sought another tribunal where he could tell his story to Him who judges in mercy. There would be no shame in that. The men of his tribe would hear of it, but they would not laugh as they had done over the fate of On-ya-tuk.

They would know that Ka-no-hos had not been afraid to die. They would be proud of him. They would call him a brave man. And, besides, the little father would be praying for him. Was not that enough?

Slowly he drew his feet upward until his knees were almost touching his chin. Cautiously he rolled over, the snow creaking under his weight so that he had to pause a dozen times before he could get his knees underneath him.

Then he halted a moment for one last glance at his watchers. It seemed to him then that the clamorous drumming of his heart must awaken the sleepers. The sound of it shut out everything else in the world—everything except the voice within him that whispered now was the time to leap.

It was the drumming of his own heart, doubtless, that deafened him to the sound of a team of dogs that plunged toward the camp in the starlight, their hot breaths making little clouds in the frosty air.

The report of a dog whip startled Ka-no-hos as if it had been a rifle shot. Then, as he leaped to his feet, it seemed as if life awoke instantly everywhere about him.

The dogs that had been asleep in the snow were on their feet snarling savagely, their hair bristling as they shook the snow from their shaggy coats. The two sergeants were awake, and Ka-no-hos felt himself seized about the knees before he could leap to freedom.

And in a moment the little father had leaped from his sledge and was standing among them, wielding the heavy end of his whip to keep the startled dogs from attacking his team. His first word was for Ka-no-hos.

"You are alive, my son!" he cried. "Thank God!"

Then he told the sergeants, his friends, why he had come.

IX

UNDER a thin, gray veil of light, the four men crossed the lake, climbed the ridge on the farther side, and dropped down into the little valley that lay below. They came at last to a spot that had been trampled until it was a hard cake of ice underfoot. Splotches of crimson stained the white snow near by.

"Here," Ka-no-hos said, and halted.

But there was no need of his speaking. A lean pack of the wilderness had been there before them and had done its work hungrily and well. The wolves had left behind them few signs except the red stains against the white.

To one side lay a torn knapsack, its contents strewn about in the snow. The sergeant from Point Barrow stepped across the trampled circle and got down on one knee to examine what looked like a torn notebook whose leaves fluttered faintly in the wind.

Soon he got to his feet and returned with the notebook in his hand. For some time, then, the two sergeants stood apart and talked together in low tones, the little father standing guard over Ka-no-hos.

Presently they came back and held out their hands to Ka-no-hos. The Loucheux stared blankly, puzzled because they had suddenly offered the white man's pledge of friendship.

"It is as we suspected," said the sergeant from MacPherson, addressing the little father. "The sergeant, here, came down from Barrow three days ago in the hope that one, Gus Fream, second mate with the San Carlos, would try to get out by way of MacPherson. He was wanted for the murder of three of the crew, after the others had died from scurvy. An Eskimo whaler laid the information against him. We'd like to have got him, but the luck was against us. We might as well get back now. There's nothing else to do."

The little father spoke hesitatingly.

"And Ka-no-hos, sergeant?"

The sergeant turned to the man from Barrow.

"I think we can make out a case of self-defense, can't we, sergeant?" he suggested.

"If any one wants to make a charge," was the reply.

"For the sake of the records, I mean."

"Put what you like into the records, sergeant. Gus Fream was fed to the wolves—"

"By the Almighty," the man from MacPherson added.

"The Almighty looks after his own," echoed the little father as he took the hand of Ka-no-hos.

THE LAST KISS

THE cowbells wander through the woods,
'Neath arching boughs a stream runs by,
In all the ferny solitudes
A chipmunk and a butterfly
Are all that is—and You and I.

This summer day, with all its flowers,
With all its green and gold and blue,
Just for a little while is ours;
Just for a little—I and you,
Till the stars rise and bring the dew.

One perfect day to us is given,
To-morrow—all the aching years;
This is our last short day in heaven,
The last of all our kisses nears—
Then life too arid even for tears.

A year ago, how rich we seemed!
Like piles of gold our kisses lay,
Enough to last our lives, we dreamed,
And lives to come, we used to say—
Yet are we at the last to-day.

The last, I say, yet scarce believe
What all my heart is black with knowing;
Doomed, I yet watch for some reprieve,
But know too well that Love is going,
As sure as yonder stream is flowing.

Look round us—how the hot sun burns
In plots of glory here and there,
Pouring its gold among the ferns:
So burned my lips upon your hair,
So rained our kisses, love, last year.

We saw not where a shadow loomed
That, from its first auroral hour,
Our happy paradise foredoomed,
A Fate, within whose icy power
Love blooms as helpless as a flower.

His shadow by the dial stands,
The golden moments shudder past,
Soon shall he smite apart our hands,
In vain we hold each other fast—
And the last kiss must come at last.

The last!—then be it charged with fire,
With sacred passion wild and white,
With such a glory of desire,
We two shall vanish in its light,
And find each other in God's sight.

Richard Le Gallienne

Dark Dodgers

A SAMPLE OF AMERICAN BALLYHOO IS TRANSPLANTED TO
BRITISH SOIL TO THE UTTER AMAZEMENT
OF THE MERRYMAKERS

By Richard Howells Watkins

MISS BARBARA GUTHRIE RICE, the youngest and slenderest and prettiest instructor of physical education ever possessed by Bryant College, in the State of Connecticut, solemnly placed one half crown, a two shilling piece, and three pennies on the pink palm of her hand.

Then she looked hopefully at her friend, Ian Henderson MacArthur, who, despite his own youth, was no less than an assistant professor of economics in Northeastern University.

But MacArthur shook his head rather drearily, and produced only a shilling and a sixpenny piece.

Barbara moaned. Aided by a frown of concentration, she reckoned up this wealth.

"Two and a half shill—I mean two and six, plus two, plus threepence—that's—ah, four and nine, and your one and six makes five and fifteen pence—I mean—oh, good Heavens, Mac—we've only about a dollar fifty between us. Marooned in a dinky English railway station—and the good old U. S. A. more than three thousand miles away!"

"It's considerably farther than it was earlier in the day," MacArthur averred. "That money's not enough to pay for a cable."

Former fellow students at a co-ed university and intermittent friends, they had met by chance in London, each poised for a swift, solitary tour of England. Together they had come down to Astonby-by-the-Sea to spend a whole afternoon and evening in viewing the English at play. And then, while they left their bags for a moment to find out about trains back, sudden, cataclysmic disaster smote them.

"To think that one of our own country-

men could rob us of our means of living—of our very passports and steamer tickets home!" Barbara Rice exclaimed in a rapture of dramatic and patriotic disgust.

But MacArthur did not join in his friend's righteous emotion.

"What's to be done?" he inquired prosaically. "A dollar and a half will last longer in the food line in England than in the States, but it won't carry us beyond twenty-four hours."

At that moment the station master of Astonby-by-the-Sea reentered the booking office. He was a tall, dukelike person, with white hair and a white mustache, unbent of backbone and lustrous of eye.

"The constabulary have been notified, and I have found the porter who carried the luggage, sir," he reported gravely to MacArthur.

"Trot him in," Barbara instructed briskly. "Did he get a good look at the crook?"

"You wish to speak to him, miss?" the station master asked uncertainly, and upon being assured that this was so, he called in from the platform a diminutive, uniformed individual, whose personality was completely obscured by the flaming red tie of office that adorned his neck.

Prodded into speech, the porter, clutching his cap as if he feared to lose it at the skilled hands of another American crook, repeated in detail his story.

"I see the two bags on the down platform, and I see the lidy and gentleman as nipped orf with 'em. come up to 'em. 'These yours, sir?' I arks 'im, and 'e looks at me sharp, like.

"'If they ain't mine,' 'e says, sir, 'they belong to fellows that used to pick fleas '—or—or p'rhaps flies, it was—' orf the same

bat,' 'e says, so I see he was an American, though I didn't mike out quite 'is meanin'. 'Why,' he arks, fierce like, 'are you tryin' to stop me from miking a 'ome run with 'em?'

"Oh, no, sir,' I says, quick. 'I was meanin' to arsk if I might carry 'em for you, sir?'

"He turns to the lidy an' says, laughin', 'Ow about it, Daphne? Shall we let 'im do a double play for us?'

"Why not?' she says, laughing back at 'im and lookin' at me. 'E can't do more than brike 'is back tryin'. And by that, sir, I knew she was no American lidy, but a girl from Lunnon w'y."

"The girl was English?" Barbara murmured thoughtfully.

"Yes, miss," the porter replied stoutly. "As English as I am, miss, and believe it or not, sir, I took 'im for English, too, until 'e opened 'is mouth. Dressed well, like a racing man, miss, but too big to be a jockey and not 'arf enough jewelry for a bookie. Thirteen stone, 'e'd w'igh, easy."

The little railroad employee nodded emphatically, closing his eyes as if to visualize the thief again.

"And so I carried the bags to the taxi for 'im, and 'e tipped me 'andsome, like an American, and 'e says—'is exact words—'Guess you was tryin' to kid me abaht who owns these bags. Why, I never stole nothink but second in my life.' And I said, 'Yes, sir. Thank'ee, sir,' for 'e 'ad been generous. Stroike me, sir, if I knew wot 'e meant."

"And strike me," Barbara mumbled disconsolately, "if I know what we're going to do."

"It's never 'appened before 'ere at Astonby-by-the-Sea, miss," the porter assured her with sturdy emphasis. "Passengers orfen leaves their luggage arahnd when the cloakroom is closed, and no 'arm comes. But to-morrow, from first train time orn, I'll be watchin' sharp like for 'im and 'is Lunnon lidy friend, and if I sees 'im—"

He paused graphically, and moistened his lips. Remembering that the thief weighed thirteen stone—a weight converted after a mental struggle into one hundred and eighty-two pounds—neither Barbara nor Ian MacArthur surveyed him with too much hope.

The station master also expressed his certitude that the American crook would not pass through his station unscathed.

"But this coast is lined with small sea-side resorts, and he can get from one to the next by char-à-banc or car," he added gloomily.

"He can afford to travel by motor car now," Barbara admitted regretfully.

"They goes everywhere, them charas," the porter interposed.

The station master nodded his stately white head.

"The crowd's in Astonby this week, and he's safe, accordingly, for lots of Americans are here to watch the sports, like yourselves. Next week the fairs and the crowds will be moving on to Little Alesworthy, farther down the coast, and they'll not be going, many of them, by railway. I fear you must not hope too much from us."

II

BARBARA and MacArthur left the station in silence. On their holiday jaunts each had first doubted, then enjoyed, and finally embraced the sublime faith of the English people in the honesty of the general public.

And now they had been victimized by an American sneak thief. Had he been of any other nationality the crime would have stung less and permitted louder protests. As it was they tasted bitter fruit as, without a word to each other, they descended the road leading down the white, crumbling cliffs to the pebbly strand of Astonby.

Nor were their spirits raised perceptibly by aural and visual evidence of what they had come to view—the Astonby-by-the-Sea regatta and water sports. At that moment a quarter mile swimming race was in progress.

Crowds lined the beach and cheered themselves from ordinary pink in the face to excited blue. With whoops, squeals, and shouted advice they displayed that lack of reserve which constantly fractured the sensibilities of the young Americans.

From childhood they had been given to understand that stolidity was the outstanding feature of the English character. And now look at them! The Americans stared at these riotous merry-makers with stony eyes.

Some distance from the cheering holiday throng, and an equal distance from a grassy stretch on which stood the clustered tents of an itinerant fair, Barbara Rice plunked herself down on the hard, smooth, flint pebbles that constituted Astonby's

beach. She stared with smoldering eyes out to sea. MacArthur silently, but more cautiously, dropped beside her.

"Here we are, virtually penniless, without even a change of clothes, miles from an American consular officer, and in a country where there are almost a million unemployed seeking jobs at the present time," Barbara summed up the situation.

"Nine hundred and eighty-seven thou—" Professor MacArthur began, but Barbara cut him short.

"Oh, turn off your infernal economics, Mac," she besought him. "Is political economy going to get us out of this hole?"

"Physical education certainly isn't," her friend retorted indignantly. "Nor elocution, either," he added.

But despite MacArthur's belligerent tone he gazed covertly at the girl, with a most apprehensive expression. She appeared to him a fragile sort of person to be thrown upon the world, or rather upon England, without food, shelter, or transportation.

But Barbara, at his words, sat up straight. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, and her breath came faster. MacArthur recognized the symptoms as of old. Miss Rice was in the process of rebounding.

Her helplessness and her almost childishness were gone. Only a glance was required to see that here was a young lady well able to take care of herself—or at least she thought she could, which is the same thing.

"We're going to get out of this hole," she asserted energetically. "And we're not going home as consul's passengers, either, if I can help it."

"That's the spirit," MacArthur said approvingly.

He felt, with sudden apprehension, for his pipe. A genial smile spread over his countenance as he discovered it in his pocket, and with it a well-filled tobacco pouch.

"Barb, I've always admired the scintillating brilliancy of your mind," he added. "But never before have I felt so dependent upon it. Scintillate, Barb; I'm in your hands."

And to prove this last statement he stretched flat on the round flints. After a wiggle or two to dislodge several too prominent pebbles, he was quiet.

Placidly he drew a puff from his pipe and prepared to enjoy the sun. It was shining

with that faint emanation of conscious rectitude which the sun always gives forth when it shines upon any merrymaking in England.

Barbara turned an indignant back upon this picture of perfect confidence in her. There was a glint of devilry in her blue eyes, but no other indication that she was preparing to scintillate by request. She continued to stare at the sea.

"I would like to get within hitting distance of that thief," she murmured, at last, and doubled her hands into white and rather unconvincing fists.

MacArthur caught the words and turned a reproving head. He withdrew his pipe from his mouth.

"Back to the job," he commanded sternly. "We have been robbed. That's all over—unless he comes back for the pipe. What you've got to do is to confine your thoughts to the future. Just how do we go about drawing food, shelter, drink, and steamship money from the hospitable English people who are firmly of the opinion that all Americans are born rich and stay that way without effort?"

"Of course there are lots of things we could do," the girl said thoughtfully. "We're young, vigorous, ambitious, not lacking in brains—if I do say so myself—well educated—comparatively speaking—and, in short, just the type of person the world needs."

MacArthur snorted.

"A fine address to the graduating class, but it has a certain vagueness about it that prevents me from applying it to the present situation," he said cuttingly. "Particularize, Barb! How do we eat?"

But Barbara did not hear him. Her eyes were dreamy, now, instead of sparkling, and she was murmuring without conscious direction: "American—American—English—English—seaside resort—money—money—money."

After a careful scrutiny of the thoughtful countenance of the girl, MacArthur, with a soft and hopeful grunt, lowered himself gently to the flints once more. He smoked quietly, even furtively. He had detected symptoms of scintillation and hoped for a genuine flash.

His second pipe was empty before Barbara stirred.

"Have you got it?" MacArthur demanded tensely, twisting toward her on the pebbles.

"I've got something," Barbara replied. "A way to make money."

MacArthur sat up and shrewdly inspected her countenance. There was undoubtedly an idea beneath the animated features, but there was also a flash of that deviltry for which he had a deep and abiding dislike.

"Proceed!" he commanded.

The girl nodded brightly toward the collection of dingy tents that had been erected on the water front for the delight of the merry-makers.

"Do you see that carnival? Fair, I think they call it here."

"I see it," MacArthur admitted. He viewed it suspiciously.

"Well, all we have to do is start a 'Hit the dodger in the eye and get a good cigar' booth."

III

IAN HENDERSON MACARTHUR stared glassily at his friend. Feebly he worked his jaw, as if testing its power of movement after this stunning shock. Finally he arose to his feet that he might look down upon her from a great height.

"Unless this is benighted humor," he said, "the proverb concerning the mountain that brought forth a mouse is inadequate. Something with a continent and a flea in it will have to be substituted. Do you—"

Barbara Rice laughed most merrily.

"You asked me to particularize," she reminded him. "I have."

"But why—why?" MacArthur asked plaintively.

"Aiding people to play is much more lucrative than aiding them to work—or working for them," the girl said positively. "Compare your own salary with that of a football coach." She looked him sternly in the eye.

"Oh, go on; go on," MacArthur muttered bitterly. "As a logician you have your faults, but your elocution is pulling you through."

"We have no capital—nothing to play with," the girl continued with calmness. "Therefore we must associate ourselves with those pallid trappings of joy among the tents. You agree? You'd better!"

MacArthur said nothing. He had argued with Barbara before, and now he remembered the outcome of all the arguments.

"Just think!" Barbara said with rising

enthusiasm. "We'll be brought into closer contact with the people over here—we'll be purveyors of their pleasure, gypsies upon their soil, seeing their land as they see it, not as mere tourists. We're frightfully lucky to have had those bags stolen, Mac; otherwise I'd never have thought of starting a dodger show."

Her eyes sparkled with the fires of conviction, and sought MacArthur's gaze, hungry to devour criticism of this unexcelled opportunity. But MacArthur was grasping at a straw that promised escape from her horrendous idea.

"You go over to the boss of the fair and tell him all about it," he said, and permitted himself an inch of smile. "I'll wait for you here. And should he get violent I'll authorize you to spend up to threepence of our capital on arnica."

"I'll go!" Barbara said instantly, and she walked briskly away, as confident a woman of destiny as ever trod the flints of Astonby-by-the-Sea.

MacArthur stood bolt upright, watching the slow, inevitable progress of the girl over the pebbles to the cluster of tents. She showed not the least indication of a wish to turn back.

His pipe was forgotten, spilling its good American tobacco on the strand; his skin exuded perspiration unwarranted by the mild sunlight; and his eyes dwelt unwaveringly upon the figure that grew smaller and smaller, and finally disappeared.

In the horrible wait that ensued, MacArthur decided darkly that he was threatened with palpitation of the heart, or that his valves were pitted, or something. Ferreently he hoped for the worst.

When Barbara Rice came into his view again she was walking quickly, almost rapidly. What that meant MacArthur, by an effort, refrained from considering too deeply. Certainly she seemed eager to leave the vicinity of the tents.

But when she drew nearer, his heart took on greater and greater weight; it sagged in his chest. There was a certain intensity of purpose in the way the girl tripped along over the pebbles. And when she approached even closer, MacArthur abandoned hope. There was jubilation of an unholy variety in the girl's face.

"He bit like a hungry trout," she announced happily. "The coconut shy was going very badly—not paying even its fixed charges—so he turned the whole tent

over to me, and gave me a free hand up to ten shillings to buy old tennis balls from the local tennis club."

"We—we are really committed to this—this enterprise, then?" MacArthur asked faintly.

"I have converted the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune into mere tennis balls—yes," Barbara admitted modestly. "At first he wanted to add me to the hall of freaks, declaring that a destitute American was a far greater curiosity than his stellar attraction, a three-legged boy, and also a more pleasing one. Would you call that English humor or English enterprise?"

"I'm quite strong," MacArthur muttered, with feverish calculation. "Perhaps I might get a job as a railway porter. Taking tips would be less torturing than this base, penny-snatching, degrad—"

"Restrain your applause," Barbara broke in. "Mac, for more reasons than one this career is our best chance to view the American coast line in time to hold down our teaching jobs. Enough! This is our fate."

"I wish I had done some thinking myself, instead of leaving it to you," MacArthur murmured with heartfelt regret.

"Think time is over," Barbara announced briskly. "We have work to do. 'Hit the dodger' shows do not spring full panoplied from the soil. And, too, we have our parts to pick and learn."

"Parts to pick?"

"Certainly. Who is to be barker and who the—ah—star?"

MacArthur stared at the girl and sputtered unintelligibly.

"You know very well I wouldn't permit you to stand there and let a crowd of—of—low-brows throw balls at you," he burst out at last. "And, besides, I couldn't stand up and gibber at a crowd, inviting them to throw balls at a burned cork darky. Why, I'd rather be the darky!"

Barbara laughed, with a gurgling excitement.

"All right; I'll let you have most of the fun. As barker I'll have an unsurpassable chance to test how American slang goes here. I might want to write a paper on it sometime when I'm too old to do physical instruction. The phrases I can put across on this English audience, the sallies that register, will—"

"As you said," MacArthur interrupted

with pitiless politeness, "we have work to do. This is not the proper moment to bore me with your hobby. Just what do I have to do? Blacken my face and dodge tennis balls that are thrown at my head, I presume."

"Meanwhile indulging in desultory merriment," Barbara explained, with dancing eyes. "Thus: 'Yah! Yah! Yah! White boy can't hit me nohow! Dar she goes! A mile wide! Yah! Yah! Yah! Lemme he'p you throw them balls.'"

She glanced at MacArthur's somber, rigid face, and went off into a gale of laughter. He waited indignantly for her to recover. He waited a long while. Then he began, dismally:

"Yah! Yah! Yah!"

But she was off again, and every time she tried to control herself his expression prevented it.

"G-get some of the joy of life into it, Mac," she finally succeeded in saying. "Remember you're a sunny, chuckle-headed old darky, who just loves to have balls thrown at his head. Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"When you are quite through—" he said stiffly.

Bravely she mastered herself.

"Think! The missiles would be baseballs in the States, but over here they're nothing but soft tennis balls. That should make you happy if nothing else does."

"That doesn't make me happy, either," the professor of economics asserted doggedly. He paused for thought, and suddenly a cheery smile lit his countenance.

"What would hearten me amazingly," he said, his eyes seeing visions, "would be your face if you should discern among the spectators the features of old Prexy Glasden."

This picture left Barbara utterly devoid of mirth.

"I am taking all precautions," she assured MacArthur emphatically. "Of course I am blacking up, too. And," she added meaningly, "I cannot conceive of this episode reaching Bryant College without also being noised about at Northeastern."

"I comprehend you," MacArthur assured her. "We are in each other's hands. Let us proceed honestly, but stealthily, with this iniquity."

They walked across the strand together, and found Mr. Spiler, the proprietor of the fair, awaiting them. He was a brisk little

cockney, of dark or dirty complexion, rather like an unkempt wire-haired terrier, with a bad eye and a smirk that in no way detracted from his general air of business.

"Blime," he exclaimed, after an unembarrassed stare at the stiff figure and wooden countenance of MacArthur. "This 'ere is comin' to be a 'igh-toned aggergation."

"This is my friend, Sambo Johnson, Mr. Spiler," Barbara said, indicating the professor of economics with a clever jerk of her supple thumb. "He is noted in fifty-seven States, from Utah to Nevada, and from New Hampshire to Vermont, for his blackface comedy and deft manipulation of his neck. He never smiles outside of business hours."

"Must be Scotch," Mr. Spiler suggested, honoring the last statement. Upon a glare from MacArthur, he added hastily, almost reverently:

"'E looks orl that you say, miss."

"Where do we do our stuff?" Barbara inquired.

Mr. Spiler led the way.

"I 'aven't moved out the cokernuts yet," he said, halting before a tent less brunette in the hue of its canvas than its neighbors. "It's a shime the w'y they've turned aw'y from the cokernuts since the war, but they 'as, an' that's that."

"One must regard the whim of one's public," Barbara agreed solemnly. She scanned the location with a critical eye. "How about another gas flare there?" she demanded.

"Crikey! You can see right horf the lidy's been in the perfession," Mr. Spiler remarked admiringly. "You shall 'ave it if I 'ave to tike it from the rings. But get hon with it; I'll not be bothering of you now."

IV

THE lengthy English twilight darkened into night at last, long after the preparations of the amateur showmen were complete. Gas burners that had been mere orange pin points in the evening waxed into dazzling nuclei of flame.

Scattered groups of people became large throngs. The noise of determined merry-making rose upon the cooling air. It was a big night for Astonby-by-the-Sea, and a lucrative one for Mr. Spiler.

Between two of the brightest gas flares in the midway capered an excessively dark young woman in a burlap costume. Her

light hair was imperfectly concealed beneath a high black bearskin.

She was obviously highly excited about something—vocally and physically excited—and her gestures left no doubt in the minds of the large audience held spellbound about what so stirred her.

The cause was another creature, a male of equally midnight hue, whose head projected through a hole in a large, almost white canvas sheet at the other end of the tent. His body was hidden from view, and the head had a mysterious, disembodied look about it.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" chanted the dark female. "Look who we got heah! Sweet patooty! Take up in yo' hands one ob dem balls and smack him on de dome! Crack him on de konk! Dust off his map! Hah! Hah! Hah! Whoopee! Good ideah, but yo' aim was bad. Try again, mistah! Mitigate him one in de eye!"

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" bleated the black head protruding through the sheet, and each "Yah" was weaker than the one preceding it. "White boy can't hit me no-how! Dar she goes! A mile wide! Yah! Yah! Yah!"

Business was brisk, and MacArthur's neck was already aching from its unwonted activity, but Barbara, always a progressive spirit, wanted it better. She redoubled her evident excitement.

MacArthur, although his eyes were fixed with painful concentration on the line of throwing customers, managed to steal a glance at her. The girl appeared positively to be enjoying herself.

"Lemme show you how to biff him one on de lamp!" she whooped, and seized a tennis ball herself. MacArthur resumed his vigilant scrutiny of the more malignant customers.

Barbara threw the ball. It plopped against the canvas three inches above his head. Only woman's traditional inability to hurl a sphere saved him from a direct hit.

And it startled MacArthur, this missile from an unknown source. His look of amazement and indignation, as he realized who had flung it, pierced the burned cork comedy of his countenance so plainly that Barbara resumed with wilder vigor her prancing and vociferous rôle in an effort to center attention on herself.

"Look here, Barbara, isn't it enough—" she heard him burst out, but she succeeded

in drowning his complaint with a ballyhoo that sounded like the climax of a Hopi snake dance.

"Oh! Oh! Try yo' luck, lady!" she exhorted, pressing three balls upon a sharp-featured girl who stood in front of the rail. "Lady Luck's de bes' kind. See kin you expurgate dat guy's mug!"

"Garn!" the girl retorted with spirit. "'Oo's barmy in the crumpet? You 'it 'im yerself, an' 'e'll come and give yer what-for. That 'll be sport enough for me, deary."

"Huh!" her escort commented scornfully. "She missed him clean! Gimme them balls, girly. Now watch this real bean-ball!"

He pushed back against the crowd to give himself more room, and surveyed his target keenly, while smoke from his cigar trickled out of the corner of his mouth. Then he fainted.

But MacArthur did not duck. He was glaring with scorching ire at Barbara, and his voice, although sinking lower, was still emphatic. Curiously enough, Barbara had ceased to shout; she appeared preoccupied, if not apprehensive.

The stranger seized this golden opportunity. With a twist of his body he sent the ball whizzing at the inattentive black head. In no time at all the sphere flashed across the intervening space, and thudded against MacArthur's indignant right eye.

There followed a queer, guttural croak from the target. Then nothing but emptiness showed in the hole in the canvas sheet.

But the abrupt retirement from the show business of the most promising young man in the economics department of Northeastern University did not leave a hiatus in the crowd's entertainment. At the very moment when the tennis ball impinged upon MacArthur's eye, Barbara filled the gap. She abandoned the rôle of barker and gave a whoop of exultation, long and ululating.

Then, like a diving Venus, she poised on the top of the barrel she had used as a platform. Her position was charged with energy, electrical with action to come. It fixed every eye in the crowd.

"I've got him, Mac!" she called, and plunged cleanly over the rail into the very middle of the complacent pitcher.

And at this moment the canvas sheet itself was suddenly, tempestuously ripped to the ground. This revealed not Ian Hen-

derson MacArthur, assistant professor of economics at N. U.

It showed instead a black-faced, one-eyed, ravening creature, instinct with lust to kill somebody—to wreck something—to revenge himself upon the whole world for multitudinous indignities, culminating in this assault upon his eye.

This monster came forward with all the grave bearing of a Scottish chieftain charging, claymore in hand, to the music of the bagpipes. There was also something of the West Indian hurricane about him. MacArthur had not heard Barbara's cry, but he had decided spontaneously that it was time to express himself.

The instant after Barbara dived, the English girl also entered the action. It does not take long for an alert young London woman to see another throwing herself at her steady, and to do something about it.

"Garn!" she shrieked, and reached for Barbara's hair.

At that moment the avalanche that had once been Ian Henderson MacArthur struck a victim. It struck, to be exact, the author of the bean-ball. The force of the blow removed the man violently from his position between the two ladies and deposited him supine on the ground.

There ensued a brief moment of confusion on the part of the male spectators. The ladies—the other ladies present were already screaming with the most ladylike horror. But the men were not far behind in doing their duty.

With a medley of shouts and battle cries they converged over the fallen fighters, taking sides—any side—with an immediacy and vigor that bade fair to drive the original contestants into the earth.

What happened at the bottom of the pile no man, not even the two who were there, can say, but above them raged an internecine warfare which put the War of the Roses and the Cavalier-Roundhead scrimmage in the pillow fight class.

Those who were too jammed to swing fists, swung elbows with astonishing success, and those who happened to be head downward in the mix-up, promptly improvised rules permitting the use of feet for both offensive and defensive purposes. Thicker and thicker grew the fight as swains abandoned sweethearts to show what a man could do.

The most surprised person present was

the young lady friend of the bean-ball expert, who found herself held quite easily by the slender, burlap-gowned, black-faced young girl whom she had intended to annihilate. Physical education has its strong points.

And clear and shrill above the clatter and language of the fray rose the wail of Mr. Spiler for constables—for a large portion of the British army—to save his property.

"This 'ere's a respectable henterprise, and them Americans are 'oodlums!" he vociferated. "I won't 'ave 'em—they're too rough. S'welp me, they're no better nor bloody blaggards. Her, too!"

Constables did arrive, eventually, and after peeling off the various layers of combatants, they laid stern hands on the two condensed persons at the bottom of the stack.

MacArthur won back to breath, voice, and sanity first, and it was ill for his opponent that he did. Fortunately the flattening process undergone by the stranger had failed to squeeze beyond recognition two books of travelers' checks that the fellow carried in his inside pocket.

V

RESTORED to a whiteness far from complete, MacArthur stretched himself a trifle gingerly in a first-class railway carriage some hours later that evening and gazed at his suit case, on the opposite seat, with whole-souled satisfaction.

The burned cork had been removed from his countenance, to be sure, but he was black here, blue there, red almost everywhere else, with a tinge of yellow beneath the original black eye.

Beside him sat Barbara Guthrie Rice, completely unharmed and unmarked, and becomingly gowned in attire that was not burlap any longer. Of course she was complacent and giggly to the degree of insufferability.

"I give you credit for moving fast when you spotted him, Barb, but we certainly were rolling in luck to have him walk right up to us that way," MacArthur remarked, tenderly feeling a bruise below his right ear.

"Luck?" Barbara repeated coldly. "Do you refer to my snaring that crook as luck? It was a game of skill, no less than is—as you know now—'Hit the Dodger.'"

The assistant professor of economics

blinked as well as he could, sat up and regarded the girl blankly, but with dawning suspicion.

"The case was elementary, my dear Wats—I mean MacArthur," Barbara said grandly. "Can it be that you have not yet detected the process of ratiocination whereby I lured the fellow to us? Are you under the delusion that I picked 'Hit the Dodger' by chance?"

"What else did you pick it by?" MacArthur demanded, thoroughly aroused to the necessity for repelling any claim of brilliance on the part of this tantalizing female.

"By a clever application of the principles of psychology and by my exceptional knowledge of American slang," Barbara explained with serenity. "When I sat on the beach thinking of how to earn a living, I was also thinking of how to bag this fellow, if he had not already left town. The two aims were capable of combination, I decided, only in a 'Hit the Dodger' game."

She smiled cheerily into his parti-colored face.

"Do you see?" she asked. "The thief's talk, as reported to us by the porter, was to you only American slang. To me it was a distinct type of slang, namely, the argot of baseball. 'Pick flies off the same bat,' 'Making a home run,' 'Double play,' 'Never stole nothing but second'—all these expressions pointed to an individual who thinks, speaks, and sleeps baseball."

"To that particular type of American, Mr. Spiler's entertainments would be interesting. Consequently our best chance of finding him would be by hooking up with the fair. How? By introducing a novelty which Mr. Spiler would accept and which would appeal strongly to our unknown sneak thief. 'Hit the Dodger' with tennis balls instead of baseballs was the closest I could come to the game he loved. But it was close enough."

"How absurdly simple!" MacArthur exclaimed slightly, although he patted her hand with an air of absent-mindedness.

"But why," he added with some bitterness, "when you heard him make that bean-ball remark, and saw that he was with an English girl, didn't you seize him, instead of waiting until he had blacked my eye?"

Barbara smiled again, cheerily. "We detectives spare no pains—not even our

friends' pains—to get conclusive evidence. The manner in which he handled that ball was conclusive."

"It was!" MacArthur agreed, touching his eye.

"Poor eye!" Barbara said, leaning over and touching it, too, with light, cool fingers. "But Mac"—a look of wonder and respect was on her face—"you certainly

can fight! The way you sailed in—why, I never saw anything like it!"

"Aye," MacArthur admitted modestly, "I'm a fighter. What I lack is a manager. Barb, do you think it would do me any good to propose to you again?"

Barbara reflected.

"Well, it would keep you in training," she conceded softly.

Another Man's Poison

A ROMANCE OF BILDAD ROAD—DINK GALLUP TRIES HIS HAND AS A MATRIMONIAL PROMOTER, WITH MIXED RESULTS

By William Merriam Rouse

FOR minutes the whispering peace of Bildad Road was unbroken while Dink Gallup meditated and Bob Mace waited to hear the result of his friend's cogitations. The dirt highway through the forest, riding aloft among the mountains, was quietly alive with the dewy brilliance of a summer morning, and Dink had asserted that his mind was shortly to become alive with ideas. Meanwhile the two men sat upon the doorstep of the shack which they called home, equally indifferent to a scolding chipmunk and to the beauty of the woods which they loved so well. They were hard pressed by a dread necessity for work.

Not for a sum in real money would Mace have spoken a criticism of that heroic figure beside him; and yet he knew that if Dink had not invested twenty-five dollars in a fifth-hand car, which had burned up on the way home, they would now be living in effortless comfort, with no threat of work hanging over them. Life was easy on Bildad Road. If a man trapped and hunted in the fall, and fished in the spring, he seldom or never had to do any hard labor.

It was Dink's fault; but Dink was large and easy that way. He had explained that everything, including money, looked small to him.

Bob stretched his graceful legs out more

comfortably, and scratched the ears of his hound to pass the moments of silence which yet remained. In Gallup's large, bland eye he had detected the glow of an approaching idea, but it was not yet with them; so Mace tried not to think of his lack of breakfast, or, worse yet, of the lack of breakfast for his dog.

Bob, although of small stature compared to his gigantic friend, owned a deep chest and a pair of broad shoulders. He was built to stand hardship, but not to witness calmly the mournful hunger of his hound. He hoped Dink would have a bright idea.

Suddenly Dink heaved upward from a semirecumbent position. He was slightly jellylike, but his size gave him magnificence. From a height he looked down upon Bob Mace, and Bob knew that his friend had worked out another of his notorious plans. The plan might not be a good one, and the burden of execution would certainly fall upon Mace, but it was some help not to have to do the thinking. Moreover, all Dink Gallup's ideas were more or less entertaining.

"Bob," said Gallup, in his rich and husky voice, "this time I've got a humdinger! I'm prouder than I was the time I licked them seven lumberjacks at Valeboro!"

The last time Dink referred to that particular fight it had been five lumberjacks,

but Mace let the increase in numbers pass unchallenged. Undoubtedly there had been some lumberjacks, and, according to unprejudiced reports, Dink had emerged on his feet. Genius must be allowed some latitude.

"What do you mean, humdinger?" asked Bob. "An idea?"

"Of course! It kind of stuns me, thinking how good it is!"

"Spill it."

"Man, it's going to keep us from work the rest of our lives!"

"We don't have to be helped to keep away from work," grinned Mace. "What we want is something to keep work away from us."

"This does it!"

"Jail!" shuddered Mace, with all a mountain man's horror of any curtailment of freedom. "That's the only place I know where work can't get at a man."

"This is just as good, but it's pleasant and permanent." Gallup allowed a superior smile to stretch his mouth. "Matrimony—it's a wonder I ain't thought of it before!"

"What?" Bob Mace sat up very straight. Vague alarm began to permeate him. "You're crazy!"

"Now, hold your hosses! Matrimony's all right if it's handled right."

"Same as dynamite! Yah! It's just as good as jail, except that you have three times as much work to do as you would if you didn't get in. I'll say you're bright this morning! Look at what happened to Jumbo Pecor—got married when he was lickered up and foolish, and his wife made him go to work in the section gang. Maybe you like to load steel rails and pump a hand car. Me, I don't!"

"That's the way you be," mourned Gallup, almost with tears. "I try to do something for both of us, and you don't appreciate it. You don't even let me say what it is."

"Oh, well!" Mace wriggled, slightly ashamed of himself. "If you got a new kind of matrimony, let's hear about it."

Gallup rolled an appraising eye upon him—an eye to which the canny look returned. Dink took out his plug of chewing tobacco and thoughtfully gnawed off as much as would not interfere with speech.

"You know Flora McNeil?"

"Sure!" replied Mace. "What of it?"

"Ever notice her hair? Kind of like

old copper, except when the light strikes it, and then it's enough to make a man blink."

"I know," replied Bob, permitting his mind to dwell very impersonally upon Flora McNeil; for there was no use thinking about Flora in any other way.

"Notice her eyes? Make you think of Lake George, where you can see down twenty feet. Blue!"

"All right!" grunted Mace.

Bob had always entertained a secret fear that if he allowed himself to notice Flora very much, it would be painful.

"And ankles! Bob, them feet and ankles of hers don't belong on Bildad Road at all!"

"Say!" Mace had reached the limit of his endurance. "I'm willing to hear you talk foolish, but what's the use being mean and trying to get a man all haired up? Flora ain't anything but scenery for you and me. We might just as well go down to the store at the Corners and try to get trusted some more as to think about her."

"Don't Flora McNeil own more'n two hundred acres of land, and a good house, and don't everybody know her old man left her money in the savings bank?"

"What do I care?" snorted Mace; and by way of diverting his mind he began to fill his pipe. "With nothing but fried mush for breakfast, and no dinner coming, I got troubles enough. I got a dog, too. Jake's hungry!"

"It's Flora McNeil that's going to lift us and Jake out of our misery."

Dink Gallup said just that, and added nothing at the moment by way of explanation. Thereby he convinced Bob that he had become either secretly drunk or suddenly feeble-minded.

"You go and ask her to feed a couple of bums and a hound dog!" said Mace. "I'm going to see if I can't shoot some squirrels."

"Think a girl like Flora McNeil would let her husband starve to death? Or his dog, either? She likes dogs."

Bob Mace changed his mind. Inasmuch as there was earnestness in the wide eyes of Dink, he decided that his friend had gone crazy.

"All right," he said soothingly. "You go marry her this afternoon, and I'll be over to supper."

"You're the one that's going to marry her."

"Sure!" Mace started to go inside for his shotgun. "You stay here where it's nice and cool, and I'll come back with a mess of squirrels."

"Wait!" The loglike, hairy forearm of Dink Gallup lifted, and the paw at the end of it took hold upon Mace. Bob stopped, of necessity, and for the first time in his life began to think of resisting Gallup's strength and bulk. If Dink had gone crazy, a runaway locomotive would be a safe playmate compared to him.

"Set down," continued Dink, "while I tell you about my plan. First off, I wanted to get you interested. I'm going to explain how you and me and Jake can live for the rest of our lives without doing anything except enough to get a good appetite."

Still of two minds as to Gallup's sanity, Mace sat down. There could be no such plan, if it involved Flora McNeil. She belonged to that very small minority of Bildad Roaders who were vaguely designated as "church folks." This did not necessarily mean churchgoing, but it carried with it a certain implication of respectability and financial soundness.

Bob and Dink had gone to district school with Flora, and in the easy democracy of the mountains, had never called her by anything but her first name. She was friendly with them, but the possibility that she would marry either one seemed as remote as the chance that she would make a house pet of a woodchuck.

"I'm listening," said Bob patiently, "but I'm getting hungrier for squirrel meat every minute."

"You won't be hungry after I get through talking," replied Dink, and with a heave of the shoulders he threw himself into his task of explanation.

From the moment when Bob should get up from that doorstep he outlined his movements through a campaign which was to terminate only with a minister or a justice of the peace, and witnesses. Gallup did not go so far as to suggest sentences that were to be repeated verbatim, but he did strike the note for conversations with Flora, which were to mount to a crescendo of triumph.

From frank disbelief and scorn, Mace passed to doubt, and finally to faith in Gallup's scheme. When finally Dink's persuading voice faded, Bob was convinced that the plan was as sure of working as a

human plan could be. The heaviness which oppressed him was not due to any doubt of his ability to marry Flora McNeil, if he followed the prescription. He believed that any fairly bright and presentable young man could do it.

"I wouldn't do it for myself, nor for you," he said at last; "but on account of Jake I'll see it through. Jake's got to eat more regular."

II

A WEEK from the day of the unfolding of Dink Gallup's plan for salvation from work, Bob Mace sat in a cushioned rocking chair on Flora McNeil's front porch. Jake lay beside him, nose between paws, and the ribs which had been so easy to count on that desperate day a week since, were no longer visible. Jake was all right, and so was his master.

Bob's pipe was drawing well. With grateful eye and nose he considered the rambler roses which shaded the porch. Under his belt there was profound peace—a peace induced by crisp fried salt pork, boiled potatoes with milk gravy, flapjacks made with buttermilk and served under a covering of soft maple sugar, hot biscuit, blueberry pie, and tea.

Down toward the wholesome brown of Bildad Road stretched a grass plot which was one of the few in that neighborhood to know the caress of a lawn mower. The board fence had been whitewashed a scant twenty-four hours before. Around the house there drifted from the kitchen chimney a faint odor of wood smoke, and from the cool depths of the interior came the light tap of Flora McNeil's feet. It was less than five minutes since she had come out to bring a can of cut plug smoking tobacco, which she said had belonged to her father.

That Mace had whitewashed the fence and mowed the lawn did not trouble him greatly. A man with sand ought to be able to stand a little non-permanent work in a good cause. Bob had even offered to do the fence over when Flora's blue eyes clouded at its slightly shabby appearance. Whitewashing a fence was nothing when a girl like Flora stood by and served ginger cookies and lemonade.

The *tap, tap* of her feet came to the screen door, and a moment later she was sitting in the other cushioned rocking-chair, smiling faintly across ten feet of space at

Bob. It was the sentimental hour of the afternoon that comes with about the third pipe after the midday meal. The heart of Bob Mace swelled within him. In the beginning it had taken only about an hour for him to fall in love with Flora, and from that first hour until he felt assured about the working of Dink's plan he had suffered. Now there was no longer any doubt—it was only a question of time before he would ask her to marry him.

This reminded him that the faster he worked the sooner he could hold that lovely copper-colored head against his pounding heart. Bob had tried to get away with a little spooning the first evening, and he had almost found himself in the road.

"If folks would only realize," he began, with a preliminary clearing of his throat and a wave of the nice brier that had belonged to the late Mr. McNeil, "how it pays to keep things up, every place along Bildad Road would look just as neat as this does. It's a shame the way most of the boys let their front dooryards go to rack and ruin!"

"Yes," agreed Flora; "but maybe they'd rather rest than swing a scythe."

"They's too much resting around here, and they's too many kitchen tunks where they dance all night and lay to the hard cider over into the next day." Bob spoke virtuously, but a sudden revolt of his spirit made him hedge. "Of course, I don't mean that a feller never wants to dance or take a drink of cider, but—"

"I know," she murmured. "What was that piece of poetry you said to me last night in the moonlight? It shows what you mean."

"Oh, yes!"

Mace cleared his throat again and fixed his eyes upon the neatly painted ceiling of the porch. Then he recited:

"A dog that wags his tail and plays
Is nice around a place;
But dogs that wag and never hunt
Are always in disgrace."

"That's it!" exclaimed Flora, with her very desirable lips parting in a smile which Mace had learned to provoke frequently. "What book did that come from, Bob?"

"I made it up out of my own head," he told her modestly. "It shows how I feel about things."

"Smart boy!" she applauded. "It's funny that I never realized the truth about

you and Dink. Pop always said that your character had never been starched and ironed, and that Dink didn't have any at all."

"I don't blame your father a bit," said Bob, while he fought desperately against what felt like a blush. "Any outsider looking at us would think that, or worse; but the way we are is on account of our circumstances. What we need, Flora, is a woman to encourage us."

"From the way you've talked ever since you stopped in to find out what time the Sunday services at the Corners begun, I don't see you need an awful lot of encouragement. I was surprised, Bob. If you'd just got religion at a revival, I'd have understood it, but I never saw a Bildad Roder that wanted to go to church in cold blood before."

"Nope!" Mace shook his head sadly. "The boys don't take life serious enough."

"Nor a Bildad Roder that would mow an old maid's lawn and whitewash her fence and not take any pay for it."

"Old maid!" he roared, for a moment forgetting the mournful piety with which he had flavored his voice. "If you're an old maid, I'm a spavined flivver like the one Dink bought with all our money! What's more, you don't have to be an old maid more'n an hour longer, if—"

"There! There!" Flora lifted a hand, and Bob sank back in his chair, breathing hard. "Take it easy! I've got so interested in your character that I want to find out all about it before we get any better acquainted than we've been all our lives. Why, there comes your friend, Dink Gallup, up the road! You're here so much I suppose he gets lonesome."

"Darn Dink Gallup!" muttered Mace, twisting around in his chair. "I can get along without seeing him except bedtime and breakfast."

"Oh, we'd better ask him to come up and sit down," said Flora, with delightful intimacy, and she rose to wave an invitation.

Dink eased himself into a third rocker and regarded Mace with a quirk in his eye. He need ask no questions to know that things were going well; and when the silver voice of Flora claimed his attention, he gave it magnificently, until he got the full purport of her words.

"Dink," she said, smiling upon him with even a hint of coquetry, "I'm so glad

you happened by! I've got to have a little dry wood to get supper for Bob, and I wish you'd go out back and saw and split some for me. Will you?"

"Why, sure!" Gallup worked his jaw a few times before he found the additional words for which he suddenly became anxious. "I'd like to work up your whole woodpile, Flora, only I got a stitch in my shoulder muscles. You know I'm the champeen wrist twister of Bildad Road, and I had to twist in the store at the Corners last night. They brought over twelve men from the other side of Coon Mountain. Figgered they wasn't any one man could twist me, and the only way they could get the champeenship was to tire me out, so's the last man would win. I rapped knuckles for all of 'em, but it kind of done my arm up for a day or two. I got to be careful."

"That's a shame!" cried Flora. "You must feel bad not to be able to work. You ought to have some land that would take care of you, Dink. Why, even part of my land would be enough for you!"

"That's just what I ought to have!"

"But we've got to think about your arm."

"Yep," he agreed. "A champeen has got to."

"I'll go upstairs and get some liniment."

Flora left them, with the light step that had become as music to the ears of Bob Mace. The two men gazed into each other's eyes with two slow grins widening until it seemed that human mouths could not stand the strain.

"You've done fine!" whispered Gallup. "When you going to get married?"

"If you hadn't come trampling in here, like a bull in a cornfield, I might 'a' done it to-day! I don't need any more help."

"Is that so? Where'd you be if I hadn't had the brains to think of what you should say? She ain't married because she's never had a beau that's talked saving, and religion, and hard work, and misery to her! Didn't I figger that out?"

"Sure you figgered it out, but I've had to do all the talking."

"You don't hate it so much! Spend all your time sparkin', and last night you didn't steal nothing but two doughnuts for my supper!"

"You're big enough to miss a meal!" grinned Mace. Then he suddenly sobered. "What's more, if it wasn't for Jake, I

wouldn't fool a nice girl like Flora. She's too good for me, Dink!"

"Don't you go and get stuck on her," rumbled Gallup, in alarm so sudden that he was hardly able to keep his voice down. "You ain't here to fall in love. You're here to marry us out of work!"

"I'll do as I darn please!" exclaimed Mace, with one of his rare flashes of revolt. "And if it wasn't for Jake—"

"So long as you keep her fooled until you get her hooked, I don't give a cuss," interrupted Gallup. "You and me is friends, but if you don't marry us into this patch of clover, after all the thinking I've done for you, I'll tie you in a double bow knot and throw you over a ledge into Lake Champlain! Hear me?"

"Didn't I say I would?" snapped Bob, forgetting the champion's size for an instant. He leaned forward in his chair. "I'll fix all three of us so we eat regular, but I got a right to have a little remorse while I'm doing it!"

A warning step, and Flora was with them again. With skillful fingers she rolled the sleeve back from Dink's monstrous arm and kneaded the flesh with liniment. Bliss smoothed the broad expanse of his face; but it was not until Flora gave utterance to what seemed to constitute a promise and a prophecy that Bob Mace was happy.

"Bob," she said, "you and I must see that the champion is fixed up the way he ought to be!"

III

THERE is a time for every purpose, and Bob Mace discovered this truth after he had been trying for a month to marry Flora McNeil. Through approximately four weeks he found himself traveling in a circle. He would scramble to the edge of a proposal and find himself unable to leap over. He would be hurled back mysteriously, and then he would receive some fresh proof of his excellent standing with Flora—such as a fried chicken dinner. After a time he began to suspect that she had something to do with the mystery.

At length, however, there came a languorous evening when it seemed as if there could be no failure.

All that day Bob had worked repairing the chicken house, and he was just tired enough to yield his soul to sentiment without a struggle. Moreover, the temptation was at least three times as great as usual.

Flora wore a new dress, very thin, and shorter by half a foot than was common on Bildad Road. At supper her eyes had gleamed with a provocative light, and when she came out to join Mace on the porch, she hummed faintly that ancient lovers' classic, "Comin' Thru the Rye."

Bob swallowed painfully, like a chicken with the gapes, before he could imbibe courage enough to get up and move his sinewy body over the few feet that separated them. In the beginning he had not felt the least awe for this playmate of his youth, but, after the fashion of the ordinarily husky man, the deeper he fell in love the more timorous he became. Now he tripped on one of his own feet as he crossed the porch.

"Flora!" he muttered, with a rare and rich huskiness. "Flora!"

"Flora—what?" she whispered softly.

Bob Mace discovered now that when a man is backed far enough into a corner, a benevolent power takes pity on him. He found his arm of its own accord going around Flora's slender waist—he would never have had courage to put it there. He discovered that the soft mass of her hair was nestling against the exact spot on his shirt where his fancy had pictured it. The faint, sweet odor of that gleaming crown intoxicated him, and the words which had stuck in his throat were released.

"Flora, I love you!" he growled, and blushed at such sentimental nonsense spoken aloud.

"I'm glad you said it that way, Bob," she murmured. "It's all right!"

"You mean it's *all* right?"

"Yes!"

"I never was good enough for you, Flora!"

"I have a suspicion that's so!" she told him, laughing and leaning back against his arm.

"You hadn't ought to marry me, Flora!"

"But I'm going to!"

"Flora, I—"

"Hush!" She pulled away suddenly. "Here comes your friend Dink. I'll run in and get some doughnuts and milk for him."

"Darn his hide! He can go to—"

But Flora had disappeared. Gallup was mounting the steps, chuckling as he loomed cumbrously in the twilight. He brought his vast paw down upon Mace's shoulder.

"I seen it," he said, "and I heard part of it. You got her hooked!"

"Ugh!" replied Mace, backing away.

"You certainly done fine for us!"

"Set down, can't you?" grunted Bob.

"That was the best fake I ever see or heard tell of!" chuckled Dink, not to be suppressed.

Bob Mace turned upon him with a throaty growl.

"What fake?" he demanded.

"What fake?" echoed Gallup. "Why, you poor sheep, the plan I had brains enough to think up for us—you making believe you could behave yourself, and work, and all the rest of that foolishness!"

"Don't have to make believe!" snapped Mace. "I like to work, and I don't see no harm in a man behaving himself if he wants to!"

"Great gran-ther fishhooks!" gasped Dink. "Poisoned by his own medicine!"

"I'd say you was the one poisoned," retorted Bob. "One man's meat is another man's poison. I don't feel so bad, and you seem to."

"Say!" Swift wrath took possession of Dink Gallup, and he lifted a fist that was like a dark cloud. "You know what I promised to do to you! Besides that, and beforehand, I'm going to spill the beans! I'll tell Flora what you been up to!"

Tap, tap, tap! Before Bob Mace could do more than draw breath in the effort to meet this sudden danger, Flora was with them again, her heels ringing smartly against the boards of the porch floor. It seemed to Bob that there was menace in those heel taps; they were like shots from a high-power rifle. Nevertheless, she paused to set her plate of doughnuts and her jug of milk upon a small table before she turned to the men.

"Dink," she said, and her voice was far too silky to be safe, "this is the first time I've got mad at you. You're so lazy you'd carry a kitten under each arm to breathe for you, if you could; but I don't mind that. I'd be willing to furnish the kittens; but when you let on that you're smart enough to make a fool of me, and say you've done it, I do get all roused up. Why, the only critter that Bob Mace can fool is his dog; and he knows more in a minute than you do in twenty years!"

The mass before them staggered slightly, but it was not routed. While Bob's heart sank deeper and deeper into despair,

because Flora knew the worst, Gallup recovered. He threw out his mighty chest, and his voice took on the color of injury and of indignation.

"I been cheated!" he cried. "Cheated by a woman and left flat by a man I thought was my best friend!"

"Dink," said Flora, "how would you like to have the use of that west thirty acres of mine? It's the best soil on the place. It's never been worked, and in a year you could clear it off and get rich raising garden truck."

"What?" yelled Gallup. "Dig out all them stumps myself? It's a trick to get me to strain myself, so's I won't be champion no more!"

Flora McNeil stepped closer to the dazed and despairing Bob. She leaned so close that her breath was upon his cheek, thrilling him.

"Punch him, Bob!" she whispered. "I felt of him when I rubbed liniment on his arm, and he's as soft as cornstarch pudding!"

That advice was as if she had pulled a trigger in Bob Mace. Forgetting that Dink Gallup was the champion of Bildad Road, he leaped like a cat, with his arms snapping out as if they were steel springs released.

Three times Bob felt flesh against his fists and heard the smack of his own blows. Then he was standing down on the grass that he had so carefully mowed, thoroughly bewildered. What had happened to this fight, anyway? Where was Dink?

Dink lay stretched upon the ground, staring glassily up, as Bob and Flora bent over him. He muttered, and then his voice rose in injured protest:

"Take 'em off! I can't lick more'n two dozen to once!"

"He thinks it's one of the fights he thinks he's had," said Flora. "Come on, Bob—let's go for a walk while he wakes up!"

"If we got a horse and drove over to Valeboro, we could prob'ly get a marriage license, even if it is late," suggested Mace, with renewed hope in his voice. "We could find a preacher, easy."

Flora's hand slipped into his.

"I'd just as soon!"

"This is prayer meeting night at the Corners," said Bob nobly. "We could go to church on the way home, if you want to."

"No—we'll go to that dance over at Bimbo Jenkins's place on the lake shore," declared Flora. "It's just about time I took charge of you and Jake!"

LINES TO POCAHONTAS

SHADE of the maid of long ago,

Ghost of the princess fair and gracious,

Whisper in breezes that sigh and blow

'Mid the Gothic arch of the forest spacious,

If Virginia's tale be not a myth,

Why did you never wed John Smith?

Tell us, daughter of Powhatan,

Why did you marry the other man?

Virginia's wilds in days of old

Were formed by Venus for Cupid's faring,

And Smith was a pathfinder bluff and bold,

A man of parts and of desperate daring:

The stage well set for romance—and then

John Smith drops out from your world of men.

London—and then the other John,

With a wedding ring on your slim brown finger:

A little while, then the tale is done;

The grave—and a folk song left to linger

While a tear is left to bedew an eye,

For romance is a maid that shall never die.

A maid, two Johns—and the tale is done:

Why did you marry the other one?

Olin Lyman

Ocean View Preferred

ALICE WILSON'S HUSBAND HAD TROUBLE IN KEEPING UP WITH HER FADS, SHE TOOK THEM SO SERIOUSLY AND CHANGED THEM SO OFTEN

By James Perley Hughes

"LET'S take that two thousand we saved for the trip to Paris and buy lots with it!"

Enthusiasm flashed in Alice Wilson's eyes in the wake of inspiration's call. Alice was always being seized by some divine afflatus, and she kept the sober Trusty Wilson, her well bridled husband, wondering what the next visitation would be. It was her full-blown revelation that had prompted the plan for a European trip, and Trusty hadn't smoked a palatable cigar since that historic day. He had been saving money according to the Alice Wilson plan.

"Then we won't go—just now?"

Trusty was still a little groggy. They had talked, walked, and dreamed Paris for the past six months. They had attended night classes in French at the high school, and had pored over guidebooks until they knew that the Trocadéro was just across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower as well as if they had strolled the quay in actuality; and now they were not going to Paris at all!

Trusty was stunned. He was always stunned when Alice was struck by a new idea. Ideas struck Alice like a ton of concrete, but they had the faculty of bouncing from her curly black head and laying Trusty cold.

"Then we won't go—just now?" he repeated, as he noted that his wife's dark eyes were fixed musingly upon the floor lamp. He knew that she was envisioning details, and he longed to know what it was all about. "We'll postpone it, I suppose?"

"No, we won't go at all," was her startling reply. "I think we ought to build a cute little bungalow on each lot—about four, I'd say. They'll sell like hot waffles.

I'll start drawing the plans to-morrow, and I'll have them ready by the time you get home. Then you can get estimates from the builders and start excavating Monday."

Surrounded by Alice's project to buy four lots, Alice's plans for four dissimilar bungalows, and Alice's specifications for four varied treatments of landscape gardening, Truman Cathcart Wilson, best known as Trusty, stalked through a purple haze during the days that followed, while his dreams were a congeries of his waking activities.

"We've got some lots that will just fit your requirements," said Chancellor Beggs, head of the realty firm in which Trusty looked after the rentals. "You know that Brown property facing the ocean? Ocean views are preferred, you know, and the lots are high and dry—fine to build on."

Chancellor Beggs was a power in the community, and Trusty Wilson both admired and feared him. A leading realtor was Beggs, a power in the commercial club, supervisor from the Fifth Ward, and president of the council. Besides, he was known as a go-getter. La Bija, once a sleepy little Spanish town by the sea, was being metamorphosed into a thriving suburb of a fast spreading metropolis. Realty was moving in La Bija.

"There's not much going on down at Brown's beach," the young man countered weakly.

"But watch La Bija grow!" Beggs trumpeted. "With that ocean view, the preferred view, you'll turn them over in no time."

"Yes, ocean views are preferred," Alice echoed, when her husband showed her the lots and repeated Beggs's argument.

"Why, of course! This is just what we want, and we've lost enough time already. We're partners in a big deal, and we must decide on things and agree."

"You decide and I'll agreed," said Trusty.

That arrangement had been fixed early in their marriage. With Alice, to decide was to settle all the details irrevocably, and it was written in the stars that all of Trusty's feeble efforts would not change one jot or tittle. He had ceased to experiment.

Followed frenzied financing in which a bank grudgingly took the first mortgages and a loan company the seconds. Before Trusty Wilson could plant his feet firmly upon the realty in which La Bija abounded, the houses were under way.

"I think we were foolish to let that finance company put in that call clause in our contract," the young man said one night, after he had agreed to a number of structural changes that Alice had outlined. "Six months after the houses are completed, they can call the loan. If we haven't sold them by then—"

"But you'll sell them within six weeks," his wife assured him. "Aren't you one of the liveliest wires in that poky old Beggs firm?"

"Well—maybe." Trusty was a modest soul. "But six weeks—"

"Make it four months, then—one house a month." Alice had great faith in her own judgment and her husband's ability. "Make it four months, then. What's the difference?"

"Well—maybe." Trusty was conservative as far as he himself was concerned. "Maybe, but I think—"

"Just hold the thought that you are going to sell them—sell them right away," she interrupted. "I heard a lecture at the woman's club this afternoon, and the professor said that if one held a thought long and hard enough, there was nothing that one could not accomplish. We are going to form a little circle to study under him. When one becomes *en rapport* with the infinite, the higher pragmatism—"

She stopped to gaze into her husband's paling face. Trusty Wilson's blond locks were tousled as his slender fingers pawed his hair, and his blue eyes took on a wild, haunted look. All signs pointed to Alice being struck with a new idea, and Trusty was feeling the impact. He visioned his

own steps pointing straight toward chaos. He was standing on the edge of a yawning pit in whose depths were darkness and oblivion. Four bungalows by the sea, rising like mushrooms, and now Alice was showing every symptom of breaking out with a new hobby! He sagged in his chair.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked.

"Let's not be going into that stuff until we get those houses off our hands," he pleaded.

"I was just showing you how it could be done." Alice believed in applying both new thought and ancient learning to the problems of to-day. "Get *en rapport* with the infinite, and success awaits you."

"I'd better be getting *en rapport* with my job," her husband growled. "Old Beggs gave me an awful hiding to-day. He's talking about making a change."

"Money grubber!" said Alice.

It was then that Trusty knew that she had enlisted in some new cause.

It was only a few weeks ago that the proposed trip to Paris had been dropped for this flutter in realty, and now—

Why hadn't they gone to Paris? They would probably have been penniless by now, but they would not have had four rapidly growing bungalows upon their hands and a staggering overhead of fixed charges. Fixed! Trusty laughed hollowly at the thought. They were fixed—fixed upon his shoulders.

Then, before they realized it, the four little homes by the sea were completed. Pridefully the owners inspected them, and their own hands affixed the "for sale" signs that were to remain so short a time.

"We must hold the thought that they are to be sold immediately!"

Alice's brown eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm. She had passed from the stage of neophyte in the ancient learning, and was ready to apply the lessons the visiting savant had mouthed so learnedly.

"We must remember that thought is all powerful," she parroted soberly. "We must remember that desire attracts the object and creates the opportunity. We must hold the thought strongly, firmly."

"Those interest charges are holding my thought," said Trusty. "If I should lose my job, we'd be in a fine pickle!"

"You must not give brain room to destructive ideas," his wife scolded prettily. "Cast those aside, and hold bright, happy visions of success."

"I wish old Beggs would hold some pretty pictures in his ill thatched skull! He's still talking about making a change."

In spite of Trusty's hustling and Alice's constant state of *rapport* with the infinite, the four lonely bungalows upon the beach failed to sell with anything resembling the speed at which hot waffles are supposed to be retailed. Weeks slipped by, and the summer season reached its noontide.

"We've got to do something to attract attention to them," declared the young husband one evening, when Alice was poring over a volume of esoteric philosophy. "We are in California, the land of climate, fruits, gold, and—beaches. Climate? That's done to death. Fruits? Can't raise much on a fifty-foot lot. Gold? We need it. Beaches? That's a peach of a beach."

"Yes, we must hold the thought that it's a peach of a beach."

"We might develop an art colony," suggested Trusty, groping for an idea. "Why not get hold of some of those painters we see with their easels around the country?"

"Yes—a little group that is doing things. Try holding that thought."

"It isn't worth it." Trusty discarded the vagrant fantasy. "Painters have no money. They wouldn't be painters if they had any. What we want is substantial people, like bootleggers. Now that's a fairish idea. Why not form a little group of serious drinkers, and—"

"Hold the thought," said Alice, still immersed in her book.

"That's no good either." Trusty again disowned his brain child. "Bootleggers are not serious drinkers, anyhow. They know what's in their stuff."

II

THUS time winged on. Trusty Wilson buzzed about in the light touring car that was as much a tool of his trade as an ever filled fountain pen, but not a bungalow was sold. Chancellor Beggs continued to croak threateningly about the fast ripening necessity for making a change, turning Trusty's days into nightmares of terror. Even his dreams were haunted. Strange phantoms came to him—phantoms that worked and sweated while he slept, wraiths that demanded gold for their toil, banshees that personified the interest charges.

"You know that I owe it to my sex," said Alice one evening, after he had returned

from a hectic day in which Chancellor Beggs had been a trifle more dyspeptic than usual. "I owe it to the cause. I have no children, no place as breadwinner for our little family, no profession or avocation that demands my constant attention, I am free born and a citizen, and I should demand a citizen's rights."

Trusty Wilson shuddered. For the past week he had not been enjoined to hold as many thoughts as usual, and he had nursed hopes that Alice was jogging back to normality; but here was a token of a new rash.

"What is it you owe your sex?" he queried. "I thought we had enough debts without assuming any obligations of gender. Can't you sort of handle that on the deferred payment plan—budget it, as it were, so that we won't miss it? Try the wear-as-you-pay principle."

"It has been deferred too long." Alice gestured as if she stood upon a rostrum. "It is time that we arose and asserted our rights. We have them under the Constitution, but our sex disregards them. Some one must come forward and carry the banner."

"We'll be carrying the banner if we don't sell those houses pretty soon," Trusty grumbled. "They're as empty as the day the last carpenter left."

"That reminds me," said his wife, stepping down upon the mundane plane, "that we're going to move into the end house tomorrow. I have to be in that ward if I'm going to run. Mrs. O'Fogarty is going to run in this one, and I promised that we'd move, so that I can represent the Fifth. I rented this place to Mrs. Orbell at the meeting this afternoon, after we had finished with the nominations."

Light was beginning to peep into the gray of Trusty's bewildered brain. Alice was about to enter politics!

He had heard some talk in the office about the coming municipal election, in which Chancellor Beggs was a candidate for reelection, but his own worries had overshadowed any political thoughts he might have had. Now the imbroglgio of partisan strife was to enter his own home.

His wife became more explicit.

"I'm going to run for the board of supervisors," she told him, "and we shall have to live in the Fifth Ward. That's why we are going to move." She paused as she noted his pallor. "Never mind

about the moving," she went on. "I'll attend to that. The committee has volunteered to bear the expense, as it was necessary to have a candidate in that ward to complete our organization. We must hurry up and sell those houses to friends who will vote right. Every ballot will be needed. Your share in the campaign will be to sell the houses."

"Is that all?"

Trusty had not the strength to be sarcastic. Alice looked fixedly at him, but there was no rebellion in his face.

"Yes—but you'll have to hurry. This came to-day."

She handed him a letter. Swiftly his eyes followed the neatly typed lines—lines that stressed a doom which to Trusty Wilson now seemed unavoidable. The Success Finance Company took this occasion to give him sixty days' notice that it would call its loan at the end of the sixth months' period specified in the contract.

"Sixty days! It hasn't been four months since those houses were finished," he protested hotly.

Alice nodded abstractedly.

"Yes it has," she said. "I noticed the date on the papers to-day. I found them when I was putting away some of those old mental science books that have been cluttering up the house. They were with those Paris guidebooks in the attic."

Trusty Wilson sank into a state of semi-coma. Sixty days remained, sixty days of life and liberty, and then dissolution. The blossoming dreams of four short months ago were withered flowers.

"What platform do you think I ought to run on—economy, or throw the traitors out?" Alice was directing her thoughts to the coming campaign. "Or shall I mix the two, like meat and potatoes in hash?"

"Both are safe and time-tested," he told her, his mind still focused upon the doom that loomed through the fog of perplexity. "Then you might try better schools and the city beautiful."

"You darling!" Alice threw loving arms about his neck. "I just knew you would think up something clever and original like that! I couldn't have thought of it in a million years!"

With his wife mewed up in committee meetings or making a house-to-house canvass, Trusty Wilson resumed his frenzied efforts to sell the four houses by the sea. He had looked to the noontide of the tour-

ist season as the main prop of his hopes. The inrush of visitors from the hot valleys and torrid cities had swelled the population of La Bija to thrice its winter size. Houses that remained vacant for nine months of the year rented readily for seventy-five or a hundred dollars a month. Dwellings facing favorite beaches brought fabulous returns, and yet the four lonely bungalows were filled only with echoes.

To Chancellor Beggs he went, seeking aid in the problem that haunted him.

"Unpopular location," the head of the firm said, when the young man had finished.

"You told me it was a good one when you sold me the lots."

"'Good location for a building,' were my words," Beggs reminded him coldly. "Any one could tell they were isolated. I said that ocean views are preferred, but there's a lot of ocean between San Diego and Alaska. However, if you're willing to make the deal attractive, I might take them off your hands."

"How attractive?"

The realtor named a figure.

"Why, we'd lose every cent we put into them!" Trusty paled at the thought.

"We wouldn't be able to meet our debts."

"Business is business."

"Well, it's going to be my business to sell them."

"In that case"—the head of the firm cooled his voice to the foreclosure temperature—"in that case you'd better have all your time to devote to it."

"You mean—"

"The time has come to make a change."

Trusty Wilson stumbled home. The end of the world had come. He had lost his job.

He wondered how he was going to break the news to Alice. What would she say? How would she bear up under this last annihilating blow? Thus he pondered as he gazed distractedly at the three empty houses beside his new home.

He halted as unfamiliar sounds bestirred his ear. From the living room of the end bungalow came the noise made by clapping palms together. Taken in the aggregate, it is known as applause. Then, as the tumult died away, he heard a familiar voice raised in peroration.

"What we want is economy in government," Alice was shouting. "What we

want is more honesty in civic affairs. Turn the traitors out! Let us no longer view with alarm the havoc these men are working in our fair city. Let us, instead, point with pride to better schools and a city beautiful."

More applause, louder than before.

"I decided to run for supervisor in the glorious Fifth," Alice's voice continued, "because I am determined to drive from power that arch villain, Chancellor Beggs. As president of the board, he has his hand upon La Bija's fair throat, although he masks under the cloak of a public-spirited realtor. He has threatened to buy this house from under my feet, to keep me from running against him. Mrs. Beggs, who is true to our cause, is here to testify to the truth of that statement. He has threatened to discharge my husband, who is in his employ, that his selfish schemes may be furthered. I dare him to do his worst. I dare him to discharge my husband. I dare him!"

More applause, under the cover of which Trusty Wilson sneaked around the house and disappeared into the cellar. A clatter of departing French heels soon told him that he could ascend into the light of day, and he entered the house to see Alice clearing away a mass of debris—a task known as "picking up after company."

"What was the riot about?" he asked, when his wife made known that she saw him.

"Merely a neighborhood meeting," she replied. "I made a speech—the same one that I delivered in the Fourth Ward yesterday."

"You made that same speech yesterday?"

She nodded.

"Dared old Chancellor Beggs to fire me?"

"Of course. That's part of the speech."

"Well, Chancellor took the dare."

Alice Wilson swallowed hard, and then her brown eyes flashed with anger.

"I'm glad of it!" Her voice was almost trumpetlike in its quality. "It proves what I've been telling the girls. It proves what a sneak the present incumbent of the Fifth's supervisorship is. I'm glad he did it. Now we'll raise the price and make him buy them!"

"So that was your plan!" Enthusiasm sounded in Trusty's tone for the first time in long, weary weeks. "You had a plan

to save us. You foresaw the effect of your candidacy, and your keen little brain evolved this—"

"I saw the high stone wall that hedges our sex, so I took up the banner of freedom to cut the Gordian knot," Alice retorted with a gesture, as she mixed her metaphors generously. "I have seen what a vampire we have taken into our arms, and I would cut him down ere he can take firmer root. I laugh at his petty revenge!" She burst into tears. "Did you really lose your job, honey?" she asked.

He nodded dejectedly.

"What are we going to do?" she queried, and then, without waiting for the dispirited reply that was forming: "The first thing we'll do is to sell those houses!"

III

A WEEK of intensive campaigning, but the three lonely bungalows remained unoccupied. They were offered for rent—anything to combat the fast rising tide of ruin, but tourists seemed to prefer homes near beaches upon which there was more life. The stretch of sand upon which the Wilson houses faced was seldom frequented.

"Keep plugging, Trusty," said Alice, at the end of the week's effort. "We'll win yet, but I've got to get back to my politics. The girls insist that I must lead the charge against old Chancellor Beggs."

A few days later Trusty Wilson received a letter from his former employer, suggesting that he should call at the office.

"I think I acted rather hastily the other day," Beggs said, when they had retired to the realtor's private office. "I'd be glad to take you back again, if you wish to come."

"Do you still want to buy those houses?" Trusty countered.

There was no guile in that query. The bungalows were ever on his mind.

Beggs's shrewd gray eyes gauged the young man for a moment.

"I've been mistaken in my judgment of you, Wilson," he began—rather grimly, Trusty thought. "I didn't think you had the brains to put over a deal like that, but I am willing to admit, man to man, that you have me where the hair is a bit short. Your wife is causing me no end of trouble, and I'm willing to make a proposition to you."

"And that is?"

"Your old job back if she quits the race."

"Say, listen!" Wilson burst forth in high anger. "If you think—"

"Just a minute, my boy, just a minute! I hadn't finished. With an increase in salary, and I'll take those houses off your hands, provided you move out of the Fifth Ward."

"Say, listen here, Mr. Beggs!" Trusty Wilson was aflame with indignation. "If you think for a minute that I'm going to—"

"I'll give you twenty thousand for the four."

The price was twice as much as his previous offer. It represented a handsome profit and the security of Trusty's old job, with an increase in salary.

"I'll see you in hell first!" Trusty reached for the doorknob. "If you think you can play that kind of politics, you're wrong. My wife's campaign is her own, and I've had nothing to do with it; but I shall from now on. I'm going to take the stump and tell of your attempt to bribe me!"

He stalked out in frothing indignation. His respect for Chancellor Beggs had once been a tall, well nurtured tree; now it ranked with, but after, a Jimson weed, and a wilted specimen, at that.

As he walked homeward, however, the forceful swing of outraged honor became a meditative amble. Had he the right to refuse such an offer, when perhaps it was the very thing for which Alice had been working? She had hinted it once, and now he had spoiled her plan by his untimely heroics. Too late! Too late!

But no—Alice was in the contest for principle's sake, a new thought told him. He would stand by her to the last. A weakling would have accepted Beggs's offer, but he had braved everything for the sake of honor. Ruin, ruin stark and drear, awaited him, but honor had been saved.

Quite the hero, felt Trusty Wilson as he marched up the steps of his home in the last of the four bungalows by the sea. Beggs's offer had shown his weakness. Alice's victory was assured.

"Madam supervisor"—that would be his salutation, he told himself, as he paused upon the porch.

But as he slowly opened the portal, an unfamiliar strain came to his ears. It was a gay, rollicking strain, a springtime song.

He had not realized that Alice could play so well.

As his eyes flashed into the living room, he saw that it was Adèle Johns at the piano. Her profile told him so, but the flowing Grecian draperies that accentuated her girlish charms caused him to veer his eyes sharply.

His gaze widened as he visioned three dancing nymphs, their legs unstockinged, their feet unshod, undulating across the living room floor in rhythm with the springtime song. In the center was Alice, her curling black hair encircled with a chaplet of Shasta daisies. The other nymphs danced with her, but the trained eye of a husband told him Alice was the guiding spirit, the leader, in this æsthetic offering to Terpsichore.

No need for questions. No need for answers. No need for voluntary explanation. The truth, the whole truth was too horribly apparent—Alice had had another seizure!

Politics was in the discard, for Alice never played upon more than a single string at the same time. The trip to Paris, the building of these ill-fated houses, the dip into the maelstrom of politics—each had thrown its predecessor into desuetude.

And now æsthetic dancing!

He groaned hollowly. Only an hour or so before he had scorned Chancellor Beggs's offer, spurning it as he would a traitor's price. He staggered into the tiny hall that led to the kitchen, and passed through it into a room that he had furnished as an office. A sigh came from his toe tips as he sank into a chair, to gaze blankly into space. Time passed, but he heeded not its noiseless flight.

"Did you see us? Wasn't it pretty?"

Alice burst into the room, still clad in her Hellenic robes. Trusty lifted fishy eyes to meet her sparkling glance. Enthusiasm's tide was rolling high, and Alice rode its crest.

"We're going to have moonlight dances upon the beach," she told him. "Won't that be intriguing?"

"What about politics?" he managed to gasp.

A gesture told of that toy's collapse.

"We had an awful quarrel at the committee meeting this afternoon," she added. "Mrs. Beggs is going to make up with her husband, and she refuses to give us any more material to use against him. Mrs. O'Fogarty has decided not to run, and so

has Mrs. Smythe; so I quit. Coming home, I met Adèle. She's going in for interpretive dancing, and we decided upon our beach as the best place. It's quiet, and we won't be disturbed."

"I'm glad you didn't meet a woman yegg," Trusty muttered. "You'd probably be going in for safe blowing as the only means of self-expression!"

"What's the matter, dear?" A soft light came into Alice's eyes. "You don't seem just right. Has something gone wrong?"

Quickly he told her of his interview with Chancellor Beggs. Tears brimmed upon the girl's dark lashes, as she took his blond head in her arms.

"I'm awfully sorry, honey," she murmured. "I'm awfully sorry and I'm awfully glad. You showed what sort of man you are when you refused him, even if I had quit that silly political game and you didn't know it." Then a note of gladness came into her voice. "Don't worry about the houses, dear," she went on. "If Chancellor Beggs offered five thousand each for them, he knows where he can get six. He doesn't throw away money, even in politics."

"But how are we going to sell them?"

"I don't know, but we will, and we're going back to our little home when they're sold. I don't like the Fifth Ward, anyhow."

IV

IN spite of Alice's optimism, the three houses continued vacant. Meantime æsthetic dancing bloomed. Each evening, as the waxing moon shone more and more brightly, nymphs appeared upon the sandy shores in front of the Wilson bungalows—nymphs who danced in the argent light to the rhythm of a springtime song.

Trusty Wilson sat upon his porch, immersed in woe. Only a week remained in which to sell the houses—houses that seemed like millstones chained to his neck as he threshed the financial waters wildly in an effort to keep afloat. Eyes dulled by care saw the dancing nymphs, but their graceful movements failed to hold his jaundiced gaze. As they danced, he saw figures that were strolling in the moonlight pause to watch. Others joined until a circle formed.

The next night the beach before the Wilson bungalow was peopled before the moonlight dance began, and as the orb of

night mounted higher, the crowd thickened. Inspiration sounded deep in Trusty Wilson's brain, and he dashed inside the house. He returned to find a man and a woman standing on the front walk and watching the dancers.

"Isn't that unique?" he heard the woman exclaim. "Why didn't we come down here, George? I noticed that three of these houses are vacant."

"Perhaps we could rent one," the man replied.

Trusty Wilson was upon him before he could voice further words. Trusty's training in the Beggs realty office had taught him that when a prospect's wife is interested, the iron is ready to be struck.

"Not for rent," he told them, after the first few questions and answers. "Only for sale. Magnificent ocean view. Ocean views are preferred, you know. Dancing on the beach, bathing, boating from the cove—everything."

"Do they dance every night?" the woman asked, her eyes still upon the scene.

"Every night when there's moonlight." Trusty had taken the cap off the fountain pen for which he had rushed into the house. "Unobstructible ocean view—"

"How much?" the man inquired.

"Six thousand dollars." Wilson swallowed hard. "I'm the owner."

"That's the price Mr. Beggs quoted," the woman said; "but he told you yesterday that they had been withdrawn from the market because a boom is coming. You'd better buy the green one before the price is raised."

A few minutes later Trusty Wilson collapsed onto a chair beneath the porch light as he gazed at a check that bound the bargain. Then he gathered himself with a mighty effort, took three more realty contracts from his desk, and sallied forth to "press" his luck.

One more house was sold before the crowd dispersed, but with heroic self-mastery he withheld the joyful news from Alice. The next night he drew a blank, but the third saw another bungalow disposed of to an æsthetic soul who suddenly found the ocean view attractive. Only their home remained.

Trusty Wilson could hardly keep back his jubilation. He was waiting until he had met the payments demanded by the grasping finance company. Then he would exhibit the canceled notes to Alice; but

they would keep their home. His wife's love for the beach, her joyful caperings upon the sands, the dancing that had made the sale of the three tenantless houses possible—he would not deprive her of this happiness.

Another night, and the crowds upon the beach swelled to hundreds. A stranger sought out Trusty Wilson—a man who flashed a check book and tempted him with offers of a higher price.

"I can't sell," Trusty was resolute. "My wife—she loves to dance upon the beach."

"Mine wants to," the other said grimly, "and we've got to have this place. If we don't, my name will be Dennis instead of Hugh Carroll. I'll see you in the morning."

"I'm sorry," said Trusty, as to a kindred soul.

Morning! Trusty Wilson had envisioned it, days, weeks, months before. It was the day the notes fell due, but now he could meet them and still have their beach home. Early he went to the city, where he paid his debt in full, returning joyfully to show the canceled notes to Alice.

Hugh Carroll was waiting for him, a cashier's check for eight thousand dollars in his hand. The two men sat in the living room, looking out at the sea through the wide window.

"I've got to have this place," the visitor said desperately.

"I'm sorry," Trusty began, "but I can't—"

He paused as he saw a groom from one of the La Bija riding academies lead a saddle horse down the street and then dismount before his door.

A face appeared in the hall—a face he knew to be his wife's. His eyes beheld a slender figure in tailored riding habit. Gone were the flowing Grecian draperies, the unstockinged legs, the unshod feet. Shining boots twinkled as she moved swiftly toward the front door with a farewell wave of her riding crop.

Alice was responding to another visitation.

"I'll add my personal check for five hundred dollars," Hugh Carroll tempted.

"I'll take the money," said Trusty Wilson, as Alice mounted; "but it's worth it—with this beautiful ocean view."

"Dancing on the beach in the moonlight—that's what intrigued my wife," added Carroll.

"I can't guarantee the dancing," said Trusty, as he watched the prancing saddle horse disappear around a corner. "I can't guarantee that, but perhaps, if Mrs. Carroll wishes to join, we can find a place for her. I understand there is going to be a vacancy. One of the dancers has just taken up riding."

OVERTONES

SOMETHING in the wind to-night,
Crying at my window pane,
Drives away desire to sleep,
I must lonely vigil keep;
Watch the snowflakes, swirling white,
That began at dusk in rain.

Hark! Between the wild gale's moans—
Oh, my heart, I heard it then!
High above the raging storm
Come the faint notes sweet and warm,
In the tempest's overtones,
Of a lilting voice again,

Singing to the vibrant strings
Of the heavenly harpist's chords;
Now it dies away, now swells
Like to chiming, far-off bells—
Ah, the memories it brings,
Sharp as thrusts of shining swords!

Francis Livingston Montgomery

Lords of the Palace

THE SCEPTER PASSES FROM ONE DREAD FORM OF DEATH TO
ANOTHER IN THE HEART OF INDIA'S JUNGLE

By Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Casserly

IN the slow, sleepy centuries the jungle had closed in. The rose gardens in which lovely women of Persia and Kashmir once walked had become a tangled wilderness, the spreading roots of parasitic trees had forced the fountain stones apart and brought down portions of the walls in ruins.

Yet the broken shell of Moti Mahal, the Pearl Palace, remained to show—could human eyes see it—how exquisite a gem it had been when a viceroy of the conquering Moslems had built it. That was long ago, in the days when the Mogul emperors ruled over Hindustan.

Into cool and lofty chambers, paved with marble, the light stole faintly through the thick greenery, darkening the carved windows that were filled with lacelike perforated screens of alabaster. Through these, hidden beauties had peeped down on the gilded palanquins of nobles and their gallant retinues of steel-clad warriors on elephants and horses, who had journeyed from afar to present their homage to the lord of the palace.

The empire of the Moguls had vanished; viceroy, ladies and Mussulman nobles had departed; and the conquering jungle now walled in the deserted ruin with an impenetrable maze of dense undergrowth that shut it off completely from the outer world. Long ago the road that led to it through the woodland had disappeared, smothered in vegetation.

The primeval Indian forest stretched unbroken for scores of miles on every side. Under the giant *sal* and *simal* trees, herds of wild elephants, descendants of those that had given sport to the viceroy's hunting parties, wandered unmolested, protected now by the orders of a greater emperor than the Mogul monarchs. From the or-

chid-covered boughs monkeys chattered down in foolish rage, annoyed because the great beasts disdained to notice them.

In the denser shadows of the gloomy undergrowth heavy bodied sambar stags lurked in fear of their lives, in spite of their sharp antlers; while their unarmed hinds and fawns wandered openly with greater courage. Small birds twittered in the bushes; and the jungle fowl busily pecked at the swarming insects or, at any alarm, whirled up into the highest branches of the trees.

But nothing stirred inside the impenetrable forest fencing in the Moti Mahal like that which grew up around the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. For no beast could break a way through it to disturb the peace of the ruined edifice, and its shadowy chambers were strangely silent.

The Durbar chamber—the throne room and hall of audience in which the viceroy had sat in state—was a lofty and spacious apartment faintly lit by narrow windows that were choked with the webs of generations of spiders. Set high in the walls, the panes held a few blurred traces of paint, all that was left of the ornamentation on which the greatest artists of the court of Delhi had labored long.

This vast room was paved with great slabs of marble, some displaced by the thrusting roots of jungle plants grown from seeds blown in by chance. Here and there were heaps of dust, crumbling plaster, decaying leaves, rotting vegetation—the accumulation of years—that poisoned the stagnant air.

In this room the lord of the palace had held his royal state, had given audience, rewarded, punished, raised some to high rank, degraded others, bestowed the boon of life on some, condemned their fellows

to death—an awful doom under the pounding feet of his elephants out in the courtyard now overgrown and hidden by the smothering jungle. Here the ruler had feasted, but he and his guests had long since moldered into dust.

Yet, in the vast, empty chamber high revel was being held again. Swarming out of holes in the walls, or between the dislodged slabs of the flooring, came scores of bandicoot rats as large as half grown kittens. Quarreling, courting, chasing each other, or nibbling at anything they deemed edible, they sat up, kangaroo fashion, to clean their whiskers with busy paws. Their squeaking drowned the drowsy hum of the insects hovering or circling in the still air, and the shrill, tiny cries of the geckos, the wall lizards which disputed over the flies and moths with the sinister spiders that lurked in their lacy lairs.

But, just as in the old days when the chatter of the courtiers was suddenly hushed as their lord appeared, now as swiftly silence fell on these four-footed successors. A strange, rustling sound had struck through their little tumult. The master of the palace had come among them.

II

ACROSS the floor a gray snake slid, its belly scales stretching apart to grip with their edges the cracks of the broken marble pavement and pull the shining coils forward with surprising speed. The serpent was six feet long, having a slender body and a small, pointed head with lidless, unwinking eyes and a deeply slit mouth.

Its forked tongue shot out, quivering with the ceaseless motion of an aspen leaf. This highly sensitized feeler seemed to search out the way and to threaten the position of each one of the prey around it simultaneously.

The rats were paralyzed with fright, incapable of any movement, as the slayer glided swiftly among them.

Lifting its head and a third of its length, it balanced them on the remaining coils and the thin tail. The loose skin around its neck swelled out like a flattened toy balloon, showing on the back a curious marking resembling a pair of spectacles. This proclaimed the snake to be a cobra, one of the deadliest of the many deadly reptiles of India.

Erect, with quivering tongue and head drawn in, it swayed backward and forward,

and from side to side, balancing in graceful but terrible movements, performing the dance of doom. The fascinated rodents gazed powerlessly while it chose its victim among them.

Directly before the snake a fat, well-fed youngster was sitting up on its hind quarters, staring stupidly at the curved fangs now showing in the open mouth of the death dealer. The lot fell to him.

Like lightning the cobra's head struck forward and down. Its grooved eyeteeth pierced the hairy skin, and, being loose in their sockets, were driven by the force of the blow back onto the poison bags at their bases. From these a drop of deadly venom was expelled along the groove, ran down each fang to the sharp point and thus entered the wound. Almost instantaneously the snake threw a coil around its victim and held it fast.

The striking of the blow broke the fatal charm that held the other bandicoots motionless, and they fled in panic to their holes, leaving the cobra and its prey alone in the great chamber. The stricken quarry screamed shrilly, but struggled only feebly because the swift poison paralyzed it, and the enveloping coils crushed the little body until the bones cracked and the victim died.

Then the cobra swallowed its prey and slid sluggishly over the floor to the deep hole which was his hiding place, there to lie until he was hungry again. Then the serpent would come forth once more, slim and swift, to claim still another bandicoot as his right.

Hardly had he vanished when out from concealment came the rodents, the tragedy forgotten in the relief of knowing that for several days they were safe from another such visitation. They began their light-hearted gambols again, for they never learned wisdom.

Yet this snake—Nag Samp was his Hindustani name—had preyed on generations of them. He was very old. Not even the grayest ancient of the rats could tell for how many years he had lorded it over the deserted palace.

Nag Samp's rule was undisputed; none of his sons, grandsons, and their sons dared to contest it. He brooked no rival, and more than one of his descendants had gone the way of the bandicoots into the cannibal serpent's maw. He feared nothing in his little world that lay inside the jungle fence

around the ruin, and that dense rampart kept out all the foes that could harm him—all except one.

III

IN the days of Nag Samp's youth, when the vagrant spirit moved him, he used to slip out through the tangled barrier of thorny bushes into the forest. Hunting quite far afield one day, disaster nearly overtook him.

Coiled about a lofty branch, a beautiful serpent sixteen feet long was watching the ground below for prey such as Nag Samp. It was a hamadryad, a king cobra, monarch of all the snakes of Asia, armed with a deadlier venom than even the spectacled one.

Its bite would kill a man in fifteen minutes; its pace was speedier than a pony, and so aggressive of spirit was it that it would attack human beings and animals unprovoked.

So men and beasts dread the king cobra with good reason, but not as much as all other snakes do, for on them the hamadryad feeds by preference. It is a forest dweller, and, unlike most of the serpent brood, has keen vision or some equivalent sense, for it climbs trees and lies among branches to watch for its prey.

This one marked the venturesome Nag Samp, and, uncoiling its length, began to slide down from its perch. Some instinct warned the young snake, and, writhing his fastest over the ground, he raced for home and safety.

But, quickly as he went, the king cobra moved quicker, and only the nearness of the barrier saved Nag Samp. Into the densest part, where the tangled stems of the thorny bushes were so closely knitted as to be nearly as solid as a wall, he shot headlong and slipped through where the largest girth of the pursuer found it hard to follow.

The hamadryad got through eventually, not without damage to its glossy, olive green, white banded skin; but by then Nag Samp was deep in a hole so narrow that his enemy could not follow him. The king cobra contented itself with picking up an unwary daman, or rat snake, seven feet long, caught busily engaged in swallowing a bandicoot. Later another cobra fell victim; it had foolishly taken up its abode in a wide crevice out of which the king plucked it with ease.

There was no question about the rulership of the palace while the intruder stayed, for Nag Samp abdicated, and the hamadryad was undisputed lord. But eventually it went on its way into the forest, and the gray cobra ascended the vacant throne once more. But never from that day onward did he venture beyond the walls.

The brooding heat of the summer was on the jungle now, and the dead leaves fluttered down in showers from the trees so that the grateful shade of the forest vanished, and the burning sunshine reached the ground plants and the undergrowth, withering all to tinder. Only in the darkened chambers of the ruined palace was there welcome coolness by day for its inhabitants—the sleeping bats, the lively bandicoots, the scorpions, spiders, and snakes that lodged in the walls.

Yet even here a heated wind began to penetrate, and it brought with it an acrid, suffocating smell, and strange sounds ever coming nearer. A sighing arose at times to a roar, and sank again to a sigh. A steady crackling came, followed by sharp reports which swelled into the continuous rattle of battle, as if riflemen and machine gunners were fighting throughout the forest.

The jungle was on fire. The dry grass, the withered bracken, the dense undergrowth went up in flames that licked the great tree trunks and ran along their branches, setting ablaze the oily orchids with their glossy leaves and trails of mauve and white flowers.

Fire roared up through the hollow trunks of dead giants still standing among their living fellows, bound to them by the thick creepers. The dense clumps of bamboo were sheets of flame, and the air-filled segments of their tall stems exploded with a staccato noise that mimicked the musketry.

Nearer and nearer to the palace the conflagration drew, and in through the breached wall and the empty windows came the pungent smell of burning wood, the stifling smoke, the sparks and flying fragments of withered leaves ablaze.

Wild birds flew in for safety. A troop of small monkeys, madly racing the flames through the tree tops, sprang in to seek sanctuary in the chambers. They huddled together, but not in fright; instinct told them that this solid creation of men would not burn.

Thus was the privacy of the palace invaded, but there was worse harm to come to it. For the great barrier of undergrowth that had so long preserved its seclusion went up in flames, even the parasite trees that had forced themselves between the great blocks of stone of which the walls were built.

There was one such which, dead and dry now, grew out from the exterior side of the Durbar chamber. It burned fiercely, bough and stem and root, until the masonry that held it crashed to the earth, leaving a gap like a tall gateway into the great hall. Then out swept terrified birds and monkeys in panic, to perish in the flames of the jungle.

The fire roared past and away, and the smoke stained ruins were left standing in a blackened clearing for all eyes to see. The guardian maze of undergrowth had completely disappeared.

The forest appeared dead, but nature never wholly kills. With crashing thunder and ceaseless play of dazzling lightning, the rains followed the hot weather, and green things pushed up quickly through the sooty soil that had been enriched by the ashes.

In search of this food, the animals that had fled from the fires came back. Elephant, bison, deer, antelope, and wild pig returned first, and on their heel followed the killers—tiger, panther, red dog and jackal. The forest lived again.

IV

BUT the privacy of the palace ruins was not restored. Months, years, must pass before the encircling undergrowth could reach its former height and density. Any four-footed prowler could wander now at will through the chambers that Nag Samp had looked upon as his own.

This was forcibly brought home to the tyrannical old snake. One day, as he slid over the marble pavement of the great hall, he was nearly trampled to death under the sharp hoofs of a sambar stag that came bounding madly in through the gap in the wall, fleeing from the pursuit of a victorious rival.

Rain was streaming from the stag's black coat, for the monsoon was deluging the forest. The deer was a big one, fourteen hands high at the shoulder, but, instead of the thick, two-tined antlers that it usually carried, its forehead bore only the bleeding

bases from which they had once sprung in pride.

For, like all deer, the sambar had just shed its horns, and would have to go through the annual painful and lengthy process of growing them all over again. The loss of these natural weapons had left it defenseless.

Chance had led it to take refuge in this strange place, which had none of the man smell to which wild animals are so averse. The dryness of the shelter was welcome after a wet lair on the sodden ground out in the dripping jungle, and the stag decided to remain. It did not object to the presence of such minor creatures as rats and snakes.

Nag Samp, disgusted as he was at the sambar's coming, made no hostile move, although one stab of his envenomed tooth would have killed the intruder. He had good reason to be angry, for the great brute might unwittingly trample on him, and the sharp-edged hoofs would break his delicate spine and leave him to die lingeringly, a prey to the terrible jaws of hungry ants.

But, with the retiring disposition of the reptile race, he preferred to abdicate, and remained hidden in his hole. Thus for awhile the sovereignty passed to the stag, which liked to lie up in the palace after feeding in the forest.

The seclusion suited the sambar. In time, when its fresh antlers had attained their full length and grown hard and sharp, it would go forth once more to fight.

That time never came. One day, as the setting sun threw the longest shadows of the forest giants, the stag came back from feeding to its refuge in the Durbar chamber.

From behind a pile of fallen blocks there flashed a great black and yellow body—a tiger arching to the kill.

With one huge paw flung over his victim's farther shoulder, the slayer seized the throat in his powerful jaws and jumped across the sambar's back to the other side, thus violently wrenching the head round and breaking the neck. With a groan, the stag sank to the ground. The lordship of the palace had passed again.

The tiger, his feast finished, lifted his reddened muzzle from the torn carcass and, shaking his paws as daintily as any house cat, padded across the clearing to the small stream that bubbled from a moss-grown and broken marble fountain. He drank

deeply, then looked about him for a place to sleep. The bats were flying in and out of the entrance to the Durbar chamber, so he approached it cautiously and looked in.

The shadowy place was empty; for the bandicoots and the snakes had heard him coming and gone to ground. From the ceiling great rounded lumps of clay were hanging—wild bees' nests—but the insects had retired for the night.

As the tiger stood hesitating, a sudden rainstorm swept down. This lair would be dry, there was water near, the remainder of the kill would furnish a meal for the morrow.

Yes, the place would suit him; he was gorged and sleepy. So he passed in, and the palace had a new master. Nag Samp's head was drawn back resignedly into the hole from which he had been watching the intruder.

Next morning the rain had ceased and the sun shone, the first time for many weeks. The sleeping tiger was aroused by a chorus of angry squawks and snarls.

Looking out through the gap in the wall, he saw his dinner vanishing into the maws of a score of uninvited guests. The deer's carcass was fairly hidden under a heaving mass of feathered bodies, into which jackals were thrusting their heads and withdrawing them with hastily snatched lumps of meat.

The little scavenger animals had to move swiftly to escape savage pecks from the curved beaks of the vultures. In the air, others of the foul birds were circling and swooping down to make a snatch at the prey, or, coming to earth, hopping forward to fight their way into the scrimmage.

This barefaced robbery was too much for the tiger. With an angry roar he sprang out at the thieves.

The jackals bolted, tails down. The vultures tried to fly up, but several were either too gorged to move or could not disengage their curved talons in time, and perished under the crushing blows of the robbed one's paws.

Seizing in his jaws the almost bare skeleton, the tiger dragged it into the Durbar chamber and sat growling out his rage over the meager meal left him.

The greasy trail across the marble pavement attracted the attention of a few scouts from the ants' nests under the floor. They followed it up, and, when they found the prize at the end of it, hurried back to

headquarters with the news. At once long lines of eager insects came up from the dust-rimmed, tiny holes to help the tiger to pick the bones.

He soon left them the skeleton, went out that night to find a more satisfying meal, and killed a young sambar hind not far from the ruins. Gripping it in his jaws, he jerked it up on his back and carried it home to his new lair. But this time he was careful to bring it inside the hall, where already the stag's skeleton lay picked clean and polished by the industrious ants.

V

THE tiger's reign in the palace did not last long. A rogue elephant chanced to pass the ruins one morning, and, moved by the insatiable curiosity of his kind, stopped to examine them.

At the entrance he met the tiger face to face, and with the quick ill humor that marks all animal renegades, he took exception to the big cat's presence and charged him. The tiger did not pause to argue the question, but bounded past the great bully, and the palace saw him no more, only the ants lamenting his going.

The new lord hesitated for a moment, debating whether to pursue or not. As he stood undecided, swinging his trunk, rumbling angrily, shifting restlessly from foot to foot, he was a picture of power and majesty, the incarnation of strength and dignity.

Ten feet high at the shoulder, his big, well-shaped head with curving white tusks five feet in length, his deep chest and barrel, his sturdy legs, marked him a prince among elephants. There was no beast in all the jungle that could face him in fight; and, as he passed with stately mien into the Durbar chamber, it was inconceivable that any creature existed that could dispute his ownership of the palace.

Yet, in five minutes he was bolting, screaming in wild panic, tail and ears up, waving his trunk madly, or beating his head and sides with it as he ran. All about him hovered a cloud of flying insects, settling on his eyes, his ears, his lips, and stinging him with all the venom of their angry natures.

For in entering the hall the rogue elephant had blundered against a wild bees' nest, and knocked it down, and he had been stung on the sensitive tip of his trunk in return. The pain drove him wild, and in

a shortsighted revenge he began to tear down all the wonderfully made clay homes of the honey gatherers within his reach. Then the maddened swarms flew out at him, and, a hundred thousand Davids to one Goliath, drove the great giant into a shameful rout.

Trampling down the springing undergrowth, breaking off the saplings, dodging the big trees, the elephant dashed through the great forest. His tormentors went with him, piercing him with countless burning stings.

Gradually some of the bees drifted back, to find a score of bandicoots licking the honey and eating the grubs in the broken combs that strewed the floor. With unabated fury the little warriors attacked the rodents and sent them scampering in agony to their holes. Several of the unfortunate rats, covered with fiercely stabbing bees, died there on the marble flags.

For days neither rats nor snakes dared show themselves out of their dens. Anything that moved in the Durbar chamber was at once assailed by clouds of murderous insects. The spilled honey lay untouched, and its sweet scent drifted out into the open air.

It reached the nostrils of one that relished it above all things. Into the deserted chamber, silent but for the hum of the homeless bees, shambled an awkward, uncouth bulk, as large as a young elephant, a ponderous beast with thick shaggy hair and spreading paws tipped with long nails.

It was a Himalayan bear, a giant of the ursine race, and like all its fellows, passionately fond of honey. Its long tongue curled out of the red mouth as its little eyes noted the broken combs on the floor and the many nests still hanging inside and outside the building.

Right above the entrance was a large hive. Despising the fallen combs, Reech, as the Hindus called him, waddled underneath it, stood up on his hind legs, and battered it down with his forepaws.

At once a swarm of little winged devils attacked him. Brushing them from his face—the only place where they could hurt him, for his hair was too thick to let them reach his skin elsewhere—he curled himself into a ball over the fragments of the hive. He beat the tormentors off his snout and eyes with his paws, while his long tongue searched the smashed combs, licking out the honey and the grubs.

In vain the furious cohorts of the defenders stabbed at him. He suddenly rolled over and over, crushing thousands crawling over his body, then calmly continued his meal. He had come to stay.

VI

THE rats, the ants, and the flies fattened under the scepter of Reech, the bear; for while he ruled the Moti Mahal, there were always pickings from his table. At night he wandered into the jungle to look for more solid food than honey, and then bandicoots and snakes were free to come out. Even the sulking Nag Samp emerged to snatch up a young rat.

Reech's reign promised to be a long one, because there were enough bees' nests left in his new den to keep him in sweets for a long time.

But the brute's sin had followed him. A month before, he was breaking into an ant hill in the forest, for next to honey he liked white ants.

A young woodcutter, a lithe and graceful brown-skinned boy of fifteen, naked but for a scanty loin cloth, came upon him by accident. Angry at being disturbed, the surly bear, with one blow of his great paw, struck the lad dead.

Two hours later his father found him, and saw by the spoor what had happened, although Reech had disappeared. Carrying his son's body to his hut in the mountains, he gave it into the arms of his screaming wife, then took up his gun. The father was the village shikari, and as such was permitted to possess an old muzzle-loader, with which, by dint of patient tracking and cautious waiting, he had killed more than one tiger and panther.

Henceforth no animal existed for him but his son's slayer, and he set out to trail it. He tracked it from the scene of the tragedy into the foothills, but lost it there.

He gave his days to the search, starting out before dawn in the hope of meeting the bear returning to its den after its nightly wandering. His wife nagged him now because he wasted his time on a beast for which a reward of five rupees was offered, whereas twenty-five was paid for a panther and fifty for a tiger. But Nadu, the shikari, was deaf to her reproaches and devoted all his energies to avenging his boy's death.

He found the bear at last. One day at dawn, as Reech waddled contentedly back

to the ruins after a night's roaming in the jungle, the solemn silence of the forest was shattered by a loud explosion, and the great beast pitched headforemost over the threshold of the Durbar chamber.

The traitor ants swarmed suddenly around the lifeless body. And with a fierce joy the shikari rushed in and plunged his knife again and again into the murderer of his son.

Flaying the bear, he rolled up the pelt to carry it away and show it when he claimed the reward. Then, hungry and thirsty, he went to where he had hidden a handful of parched grain, a few leathery chupaties or griddlecakes, some coarse native tobacco, his water pipe and a bottle of fiery liquor distilled from the blossoms of the mahwa tree, the flowers of which intoxicate the insects, birds and beasts that flock eagerly to eat them.

All through the long weeks of his weary tracking he had drunk nothing except water; but he had carried that bottle of strong drink to help him rejoice when his enemy lay dead. And now, sitting on the floor of the great hall in which the Moslem oppressors of the Hindus had celebrated their victories over his faith and race, he toasted his own success.

As the potent spirit mounted to his brain he looked around the ruined chamber with a patronizing eye. Some famous maharajah had owned it, no doubt. Well, Nadu, the shikari, was a great warrior, too, and

worthy of being well lodged, instead of living in a reed and bamboo hut with a sharp-tongued shrew to make his life a misery.

He would take up his abode here, and live in this palace alone and in peace. He would slay all the beasts of the forest, for never was there a greater hunter than he.

As he drank the bottle to the dregs he saw all the fierce animals of the jungle crowding around him—tigers, panthers, wild boars, bears, and rogue elephants. Yet, before his fiery glance they cowered in fear.

He raised his hand in an idle gesture—and they fled. He got up to follow, but his legs betrayed him, and he fell unconscious beside the empty bottle.

The sun sank, the swift Indian night came down, and Nadu lay so still that the rats crept out to pick up the fragments of his scarcely tasted meal. He awoke with an aching head, and, bewildered by the darkness, arose and staggered toward the faint light of the gap in the wall.

His naked foot trod on Nag Samp, silently gliding across the floor to surprise a bandicoot. The serpent curled a swift coil about the shikari's leg and struck once, twice.

With a shriek, the stricken man awoke to the realization of what had happened to him. He tore the snake from its hold and fled madly out into the darkness. A half hour later he was dead.

Once more the old gray cobra was lord of the palace.

TO ONE BORN WISE

You had the sense
Never to have bought
Experience;

How does it feel
Never to have thought
A dream was real?

Is it a gain
Always to have known
That life is vain?

Are you more gay
Always to have blown
Romance away?

You would never try
When all the rest of us
Thought we could fly;

You always *knew*;
Now you have the best of us;
Yet—have you?

Mella Russell McCallum

Fortune's Favorite

THAT VERY CAPRICIOUS JADE, LADY LUCK, SMILED ON THIS HUMBLE WOODSMAN—AND HE GRINNED RIGHT BACK

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

THE neighbors thought him queer, and worse than that—but harmless. His name was James Riller, and he had been known throughout the New Brunswick countryside as Jim, until his thirty-first year.

After that period he was always addressed and spoken of as "Patch." There was an obvious reason for the new appellation.

In one of Jim's infrequent but urgent social moods he had gone north to Hanlaw's logging camp for a treat of human companionship, and managed to arrive just in time for supper. There were freshly-fried doughnuts that night, among other good things to eat. Jim loved doughnuts.

"I sure do be in luck," he said expansively. "I be fortune's favorite, and no mistake."

That was a constant phrase with him, and it was one of his loony notions that he was lucky. He did full justice to the baked beans, hot biscuits, apple sauce, and doughnuts. Then he congratulated the cook, and reached for his tobacco sack.

"Never mind yer old pipe, Jim," Dell Crisp interrupted him. "Smoke a good seegar."

Highly flattered, Riller lit the cigar with a flourish and puffed appreciatively for a half minute. And then the cruel thing exploded in his face.

He returned from the hospital five weeks later, wearing a black patch over the hole from which his left eye had been blown.

Patch Riller continued to consider himself fortunate. He said he could see all he wanted to with one eye. He was proud of his distinctive appearance, and prouder of his new friendship with Dell Crisp.

The fact that young Mr. Crisp's atten-

tions were inspired entirely by remorse and pity did not occur to Patch. He accepted Dell's occasional visits and frequent gifts of tobacco and food as marks of friendly admiration.

Before the business of the trick cigar, Riller had been left absolutely to himself in his old house; and even after it no one except Dell paid any courtesy to him. Before or after, he was never invited out.

The truth is, the man was peculiarly unattractive in his habits and surroundings. His home, a structure of logs containing two small rooms and a dark loft, had not felt the touch of broom or scrubbing brush in ten years.

The few dishes used by him were never washed, and only occasionally scraped. His bed was an untidy mess of dirty blankets.

His live stock consisted of a horse, a pig, two dogs, a tame raccoon, and a pet crow with a broken wing. The dogs, the raccoon, and the crow shared the house with him.

He was deeply attached to all these creatures except the pig. The porker was not a fixture. It was never the same one for more than six or eight months.

The other creatures, including the horse, Napoleon, were his close friends. During his five weeks in hospital the contrite Dell Crisp looked after his pets for him. The practical joker lost money by it—and, for a time, his appetite and his sense of smell.

Dell called on Patch one afternoon in October, bearing gifts of tobacco and tea. He was dragged indoors as usual, against his customary inclination.

The visitor puffed hard on his pipe. All the pets, except the horse and the pig, were there in the little kitchen.

"What's that crow peckin' at?" Dell

asked in a tone of sharp distaste, pointing a finger.

Patch chased the bird from the dresser to the back of the wood box.

"It's a punkin pie," he replied. "I baked me four pies yesterday. Tom Coon, he got one of 'em straight off. He's real human, Tom is. Likes his victuals hot or cold, the same as yerself."

"That there crow's back on the dresser agin," Crisp pointed out.

"Leave him stop there. Ain't no use chasin' round after *him*. Don't do no harm, anyhow. Ye wouldn't miss what he'll eat of them pies. It's mostly peckin' an' pawin' with Charlie Crow when it comes to punkin pies."

"What do ye keep 'em in the kitchen for, anyhow?"

"Why wouldn't I keep 'em in the kitchen?"

Instead of answering that question, Dell said that he had to be stepping along.

"No, ye ain't," Patch returned. "Ye got to stop to supper. That's what I made the punkin pies for. Gingerbread, too—if them artful dogs ain't nosed it out an' et it."

"Can't do it, Patch."

"Sure ye kin do it! Why couldn't ye? Ye're growed up, I reckon—old enough to eat where ye want to."

At that moment one of the dogs darted into view from behind the stove, with a slab of gingerbread in his jaws, followed violently by the other dog. Their master joined the chase, which went under the table and around and around the room.

Patch won. He brushed off with a dingy hand what was left of the gingerbread.

"I got the most of it!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "We'll make out a supper all right."

Dell Crisp jumped to his feet.

"Supper!" he cried. "I'd sooner eat with the pig outside! I'm through, Jim Riller. Ye ain't human! I blowed yer eye out three year ago—but I'm through now. I been makin' a show of myself ever since, fetchin' baccy an' tea into this here hogpen an' figgerin' as yer friend. I been lowerin' myself—but I'm through with ye an' yer dirty ways. Ye're more'n I kin stomach. It's a livin' wonder the dogs an' the coon an' the crow kin stick livin' in the same house with ye!"

He went out and banged the door behind him, leaving Patch Riller open-

moued with astonishment. One of the dogs jumped and grabbed the disputed gingerbread from an unresisting hand.

"I must of done somethin' to rile him," Patch remarked ruefully.

II

PATCH RILLER certainly was queer; it was the honest opinion of many that he was no more than half-witted; and yet nobody denied his craftiness as a hunter. Where others found only tracks, Patch, with his one eye, found the hoofs and the horns and all that lay between.

He exercised his skill whenever he and his pets needed fresh meat, without regard for the seasons of the year or the laws of the Provincial Government; and although this was generally known to his neighbors, and even suspected by the game warden, it was never proved. The queer fellow was as good at hiding as at finding.

After Dell Crisp's outburst, Patch sat around and thought it over for three whole weeks. He couldn't make head or tail of Dell's behavior, for he was blissfully ignorant of the fact that his habits and domestic economy were not those of other people. He did not know, nor even suspect, that he was unpopular.

At the expiration of the three weeks—during which time he had eaten pork three times a day—he turned his thoughts from Dell Crisp's strange behavior to the urge of his own digestive organs, and struck into the woods with his rifle and his dogs.

The brutes were not hunters. As dogs, they were nothing in particular. As creatures of intelligence, they were exceptional. Unruly as they were in the house, in the woods they always walked discreetly at Patch's heels until the kill had been made, after which they were free to chase rabbits—which they never caught.

On this November day it was close upon noon before Patch jumped a young buck out of a thicket and dropped it in the middle of its first leap. He made a fire there and then, paunched and skinned the buck, boiled the kettle and broiled steaks.

He ate hastily, as humans who live with dogs are very apt to do. But he was not actually in a hurry. All the time in the calendar was his.

So, having bolted his meat and bread, he built up the fire, poured a third mug of tea, and laced it from a bottle on his hip, and lit his pipe. It was a cold, gray day.

The dogs, full of venison, found a scent of some sort and slowly went away on it with crazy little yelps.

Patch was about to refill his pipe when a strange sound caught his attention and stayed his hand. He cocked his head, listening. What he heard was the concerted howling of his dogs.

What did that mean? He had never known them to howl before, except at the moon. Their normal outcry in the woods was a silly yelping.

Patch couldn't explain it to his own satisfaction. He pocketed his pipe, stamped out the fire, grabbed his rifle, and started at a jogging run in the direction of the dismal sound.

He was nearly there when the noise ceased suddenly. He quickened his pace.

A large man lay on the frozen moss, raised on one elbow. His eyes were wide and expressionless, like a sleepwalker's, and his face was haggard and shadowed by a stubbly growth of gray and black hair. He stared at the dogs, which sat a little way off and wagged their tails.

"Lost?" Patch queried. "Where's yer guides?"

The stranger gave him a blank glance, then sank flat on his back and closed his eyes. Patch knew then, as certainly as if he had been told, that the dogs had believed the big man to be dead and had aroused him with their howls. He revived the stranger with the bottle from his hip.

Again he asked, "Where's yer guides, mister?"

"No guides," was the faint answer. "All alone. Lost. No food."

"Never seen a sport without a guide before," Patch said. "But I'll fix ye up."

He was not much more than three-quarters of the wanderer's size and weight; but he got him on his back, well up and all but toppling over, and made for the fresh meat. He got there without a halt and deposited his burden between the red carcass and the dead fire.

The ride had evidently done the big man good, for he sat up and said: "I was all in. I'm starving."

Patch made a new fire on the ashes of the old one, hung the kettle and put the little frying pan to heat. The stranger swigged the tea and fairly bolted the venison. Then he talked.

"I was looking for Bent Brook," he said. "I tried a short cut from the village. It

looked easy on the map. Thought I could do it in six hours, but lost my compass. What day is this?"

"To-day's Thursday. Why? Where's yer rifle?"

"Thursday! Three days! I got to get out, quick. I was a fool to come in. There's a train out every day, so I was told—every afternoon at three or three thirty. I must catch that train to-morrow. I must be in Montreal by ten o'clock Monday morning."

"Sure ye kin git to Millville to-morrow in plenty of time for that train. But what did ye come in for, mister—without guides nor a rifle?"

"I wasn't looking for moose. I was a fool, that's all. Must have been out of my mind with overwork and worry."

"What was ye wantin' on Bent Brook? The settlement ain't more'n nine mile from where we're settin' right now, an' my house ain't seven—not unless ye was to walk round an' round agin, like ye been doin'."

"It doesn't matter what I wanted, or thought I wanted. Sentimental foolishness! All I want now is to get back to Montreal by ten Monday morning. If I catch to-morrow's train at the village I'll make it. Can I do that? I gave my leg a twist yesterday. I can't walk it—fool that I am! Can you think of a way out? It 'll be worth money to you."

"Money, hey? I always was fortune's favorite. Sure I kin git ye out to Millville to-morrow, mister. I'll build ye a little lean-to right here; an' I'll go home to-night an' fetch in Napoleon about daybreak to carry ye, or maybe sooner 'n that; an' me an' Napoleon, we'll take ye out to the railway station on a bee line. Napoleon, he's the best hoss on Bent Brook. I'll fry ye a mess of deer meat, an' chop wood to last ye all night, before I go. I'll git ye out in time for that there train, mister, don't ye fret."

"You won't regret it, my friend. You've saved my life—and now you'll save my bacon. I'll not forget it. I'll not forget the man who saved me from my foolishness."

The fuel was soon piled beside the fire, and the lean-to of brush was quickly built. Then Patch and the dogs set out for home by the shortest way.

Faithful to his word, Patch and the horse and the dogs were back at the lean-to before the break of day. The stranger

was still sound asleep. Patch tethered the horse, built up the fallen fire, and put on kettle and frying pan before waking the big man.

It was a bitterly cold morning. The stranger shivered when he sat up under Patch's touch, then crowded close to the fire. He felt warmer after breakfast, but was evidently in a low and anxious frame of mind.

He did not say much during his long and slow horseback ride through the woods, but he swore frequently because of Napoleon's prominent spine. He refused to halt for hot tea. He smoked long cigars; and now and again he drew a wad of letters from an inner pocket and scribbled notes on the envelopes. He paid no attention to Patch's artless gabble.

They made the eighteen miles to the town of Millville in seven hours; and when the stranger realized that he was in plenty of time to catch the train, he came out of his glum humor and seized his rescuer's hand.

"Great work, my friend!" he cried. "Name your price."

"Five dollars," Patch said hopefully.

"Five dollars? Man, I owe more than that to Napoleon alone. And what about your dogs, who discovered me? And you, who saved my life?"

"That's so, mister. Make it seven dollars."

The big man laughed, produced a wallet, and pulled out two crisp bank notes.

"Here's two hundred," he said, "and I still owe you for my life."

Patch was dazed. Two hundred dollars! He may have heard of that much money before, but he had never seen it.

"Tuck it away," the stranger resumed. "I'll send you more just like it if I get to Montreal as soon as I hope to. If I don't—well, perhaps I'll have to write and borrow some of it! I was a fool to leave town when I did! Must have been crazy! But if I make it by Monday morning—and why shouldn't I?—there'll be no harm done. What's your name, my friend?"

"James Riller," Patch replied, still admiring the notes in his hand.

"Riller? Riller?"

"That's me, mister. Christened James—but now they call me Patch ever since I got my left eye blown out."

"Who was your father? Where did he live?"

"He lived right where I do, on Bent Brook; an' Amos was his name."

III

PATCH RILLER put in an easy winter. He fried doughnuts to his heart's content. Figuratively and literally, he lived on the fat of the land. On Bent Brook, two hundred dollars go a long way in victuals.

He grew fat, as did the dogs and the pig and the raccoon; and Napoleon, proud with oats and idleness, kicked his stall to splinters. Only the crow remained thin, although he pecked at pies and doughnuts from morning until night.

In late May, just when Patch was thinking of stepping out in search of human society, Dell Crisp and a stranger in a hard hat came walking in on him.

"Here's a gent was askin' for ye, Patch," Dell said. "Mr. James Riller, of Bent Brook, he said. He comes from Montreal—so he told me."

The stranger was a small man with a long, shaved face. He looked around him at the dogs, the coon, and the crow, then curiously at Patch for a full half minute.

"My name is Staver," he announced. "Bundell, Staver and Bundell. It is my painful duty to inform you that your cousin, Pelchar Riller, passed away suddenly on the twenty-third day of March last."

"Pelchar?" Patch returned. "That was my gran'pa. He was dead before I was born. I ain't got no cousin, as I knows of."

"You are mistaken," Mr. Staver declared. "I have a memorandum here, found among the late Mr. Pelchar Riller's personal papers, in his own hand, and signed and dated. That is to say, I have a true copy of it here."

He placed his attaché case on the table, opened it, and produced one of many documents.

"There has been no mistake on the part of Bundell, Staver and Bundell," he said. "Listen to this:

"Arrange for one thousand dollars a year to be paid quarterly to James Riller, of Bent Brook, County of York, N. B., Canada. Important: Said James Riller lost his left eye. He is my cousin, son of Amos Riller, who was my father's younger brother. My father, Melchor, left Bent Brook at age of fourteen. I owe my life to James—not to mention other things. I

do not regret my sentimental and untimely journey into the Bent Brook country, although I must confess that James was considerable of a shock to me."

"This, the original of it, Mr. James Riller, is signed by Pelchar Riller, and dated November the twenty-fifth, last year. Now do you recall your cousin Pelchar?"

"I call to mind the big man I found in the woods," Patch replied. "But he didn't tell me his name. But what about that there thousand dollars, mister?"

Mr. Staver smiled.

"Your cousin did not make a will," he said. "We have searched everywhere for one, in vain. You are the next of kin, Mr. James Riller. You are the late Pelchar Riller's heir."

"Does Patch git a thousand dollars a year out of it?" Dell asked.

Again the little man with the long face smiled.

"Mr. Riller was wealthy. He more than doubled his money last November, upon his return from his outing. If Mr. James Riller will sign this power of attorney, I can assure him that, even in the conservative hands of Bundell, Staver and Bundell, his yearly income will be considerably in excess of fifty thousand dollars."

Patch and Dell gaped at him.

"And I strongly advise Mr. James Riller to return with me to Montreal, where he may, under our guidance, enjoy certain comforts and refinements befitting his new condition and unknown to Bent Brook," he added.

He glanced significantly around Patch's kitchen. The coon was on the dresser with an arm deep in a pot of cold boiled potatoes, and the crow was pecking at something in a corner of the floor.

"I couldn't do that, mister—couldn't leave home," Patch said.

"Does he git the money no matter where he lives?" Dell demanded.

"Of course he gets the money wherever he resides, but of what use would it be to him in this—this hole?"

"Then I reckon he'd best stop right here," Dell asserted.

"I have not asked for your opinion, young man—and it does not interest me. I am here to talk to my client, Mr. James Riller. You will oblige me by stepping outside."

Dell Crisp stepped, reluctantly and not far. He waited on the chopping block, his

thoughts in a whirl. Twenty minutes passed; and then Patch and the Montrealer came out to him.

"I have an offer to make to you, on my client's behalf," the lawyer announced. "If you will take up your residence here, and feed and care for my client's horse, and dogs, and raccoon, and crow, an express money order for one hundred and fifty dollars will be forwarded to you on the first day of every month. My client is far too generous, in my opinion, but eighteen hundred a year, paid monthly, is the sum he names. There are conditions to this offer, of course. In the case of the death of any one of my client's pets—and the horse is classified as a pet in this connection—your monthly wage shall be reduced by the sum of twenty-five dollars; and in the case of the demise of two of said pets, fifty dollars; and so on."

"Put it down in writin'!" Dell Crisp exclaimed. "None of 'em won't die in a hundred years, if I kin help it."

Patch drove away to Millville with Mr. Staver. At the hotel there he was coaxed out of his clothes and into the bath tub; and his old clothes were destroyed and new ones of sorts purchased for him. Mr. Staver assured him that he should be garbed more elegantly and suitably at the first opportunity.

But Patch didn't care. He was wondering anxiously if Dell Crisp had remembered to steam Napoleon's oats, and to keep the door of the oven shut so that the coon could not get in there to sleep.

Charlie Coon had done that before and would have been roasted alive if Patch had not missed him and searched for him. But would Dell miss him; and, even so, would he look in the oven for him?

After one meal in a Montreal hotel, Patch refused to eat again "in company." Mr. Staver understood, and was very kind about it. He established his extraordinary client in two rooms and a bath, to which three square meals were sent in daily from a neighboring restaurant.

But toward other phases of city life Patch proved less difficult. For a time he took childish delight in natty suitings and striking neckwear; and it was not long before he found that drinking in public was much less embarrassing than eating in public.

Drinking is a much simpler operation

than eating. Forks and knives have nothing to do with it; and even if you have been accustomed to imbibing from the bottle, you will experience little if any inconvenience from the use of a glass. Patch found that he could take liquid refreshment anywhere without embarrassment.

Bundell, Staver and Bundell, and Mr. Staver particularly, did their duty by their client from Bent Brook. The little attorney took him to the best maker of glass eyes in the city, who fitted him out so that you could not have told the false from the real without poking a finger into one or the other.

But Patch was homesick. Nightly, between slipping into bed and falling to sleep, it gripped and tortured him like a physical malady; and as the excitement of the novelty of his new life wore off, the longing for his old life increased distressfully.

Letters from Dell Crisp, reporting the robust condition of his pets, did not do much toward easing his anxiety, and did nothing at all toward dulling his longing for the old ways and familiar surroundings. He was lonely in the midst of a million humans. A million alien dogs would not have seemed so strange to him.

He was tired of shaving, of sleeping between sheets, of hearing voices and wheels and the striking of booted feet on hard pavements. His ribs and feet were weary of coats and tight vests and boots.

He was sick of the food. The restaurant would not send molasses for his pancakes, but supplied over-sweet and tangless sirups instead; and the pancakes themselves lacked the true buckwheat flavor.

And so it was with the rest of the victuals from the restaurant. They all lacked something of reality. They were like everything else in this new and crowded life—strange and unreal.

Patch endured his heartache for Bent Brook as long as he could—for nine weeks and three days, to be exact. Then he went to Mr. Staver and begged to be permitted to go home. The lawyer, who was beginning to know and like the queer woodsman, patted his shoulder in a kindly manner and twisted a smile that was neither critical nor superior.

"I have no authority to detain you, Mr. Riller," he said. "You are your own master. I am simply a friend and your man of business. Go home, by all means, if you want to. I shall miss you, but I have

suspected for some time that your heart was on Bent Brook. I have even wondered if there might be a lady in the case." Mr. Staver twinkled. "There usually is."

"Much obliged," Patch returned.

He felt his smooth chin in puzzled thought. What was this about a lady.

"Do ye mean was I courtin' a girl back home?" he asked.

"That would explain your anxiety to return to the wilderness, would it not?"

Patch wagged his barbered head.

"I ain't got a girl, an' never had," he explained. "Went to a barn dance one time over to the Forks, an' there wasn't one of 'em give me a look or a word, let alone a dance. That was quite a spell back—all of twelve years—an' I ain't give 'em a thought since."

IV

PATCH RILLER and his new leather trunk and two new bags got as far as Millville by rail. He passed the night at the hotel.

Jarv Horn, the proprietor, was fooled for several minutes by the lifelike glass eye and the city clothing and haberdashery. He was deferential before the recognition; and after it he was all smiles and compliments and more deference—for the news of Patch's fortune was known far and wide by that time. He carried supper up to the rich guest's bedroom with his own proprietary hands, for which service he was rewarded with a magnificent cigar.

Patch was happy—happier than he had been for nine weeks. He was back in his own country, so near home that he could almost smell it. He ate molasses on his pancakes—and they were real pancakes, the batter of country milled buckwheat.

He invited Jarv to sup with him. He talked. He bragged. From one of the yellow bags he produced a bottle of gin.

Jake Sinker was sent for, so that a friendly game of forty-fives might be played; and when the first bottle was empty, Jarv produced another.

Patch knew very little about the game of forty-fives; and by two o'clock in the morning he knew nothing about it except that he was out fifty-six dollars. He threw the money on the table with an offhand air, as if the green and yellow notes were of no more value than a fist full of hay.

Jake Sinker took him and his expensive baggage the rest of the way next day; and, in spite of his loss of money and lack of

sleep, Patch's independence grew as the distance between himself and his birthplace diminished.

Dell Crisp was staggered when Sinker drew up in front of the Riller homestead and shouted: "Here's Mr. James Riller home agin!"

Dell's expression was that of a man who has walked against a corner of the barn in the dark. He blinked. He opened and closed his mouth without a sound.

"Give Jake a hand with the trunk," Patch said.

Mr. Riller descended from the wagon and the dogs came leaping upon him without a moment's doubt or hesitation. Glass eye, clean face, elegant attire—these things did not disguise their master from them for a second. He caught and embraced them as they jumped.

Then, without another glance at Dell, he headed for Napoleon's pasture, with the dogs still wrestling around him.

All this was done in a spirit of independence and braggadocio. He wanted Dell to understand that human companionship was no treat now to one who had lived nine weeks in the midst of multitudes.

"He must be worth a million," Sinker said to Crisp.

"About that, I reckon," Dell returned. "But why'd he come back? Why didn't he stop in Montreal?"

"Homesick, that's why. Ye'd ought to hear him tell about it last night. Me an' Jarv Horn, we couldn't hardly keep our faces straight. He was cryin' about it—about how homesick he was up to Montreal. Him with a fortune! An' me an' you workin' for a livin'! It ain't right."

"He always called himself fortune's favorite."

"Fortune's favorite, hey? I'd call him fortune's fool! But he won't have it long. Throws it round like dirt. Lost over fifty dollars last night, playin' cards. Easy come, easy go!"

"Playin' cards, was he?"

When Patch returned from his fond reunion with the old horse, the expensive baggage was out of the wagon. He tossed a ten-dollar bill to the teamster.

"The charge is fifteen," Sinker said coldly.

Patch handed over another ten, and told him to keep the change. The wagon rolled hurriedly away.

Dell laid a hand on Patch's shoulder and

shook it. His face was red and his eyes gleamed.

"That ain't no way to go on!" he exclaimed. "Five dollars was all ye'd ought to gave him. Where's the sense of chuckin' it round? Showin' off, hey? Jake Sinker gits twenty for fetchin' ye in from Millville, an' here's me workin' every blessed day an' night for ye, an' only gittin' five dollars a day. Where's the justice to that? It ain't fair!"

"Workin'?" Patch remarked. "What ye been doin'?"

He pulled away from Crisp's grasp and ran into the house; and the smell of strong soap confirmed his sudden suspicion.

The floor was clean. Everything was clean. The stove was black.

He opened the door of the inner room. There was the coon, imprisoned in a coop.

Patch jumped across the room, tore out the front of the coop and took the little animal in his arms. He turned upon Dell and angrily demanded the whereabouts of the crow. That was a facer.

"I calculated to write ye about it, Patch," Dell explained. "He got out one day—an' somethin' must of got him. I hunted the woods for him. Must of flew away—or bin et, feathers an' all."

"Ye're fired!"

"Ye can't do that, Patch. 'Tain't in the bargain. All ye kin do is dock me twenty-five a month from now on, an' that would be actin' kind of near—for a millionaire."

"Ye're fired!"

"I'll have the law on ye."

"Ye're fired, anyhow!"

Dell Crisp packed and shouldered his dunnage and went home and told his people all about it. The family consisted of his parents, a brother, and an unmarried sister.

The sister's name was Carrie. She was single from choice, not from necessity. She had a very good opinion of herself.

Having heard all that Dell had to say, Carrie told him to forget about the poor little one hundred and fifty a month, and go right back to Patch and mend the broken friendship. He went, like a dutiful brother.

The favorite of fortune had come home to Bent Brook in the first week of August. Conscious of the power of money, and overjoyed at being quit of the great city, he was as exclusive as a pig in a full trough.

But his mood of independence did not last long. He suffered an emotional revolution. Although the city had not won him, it unsettled him.

What is a great man without an audience? So Patch met Dell Crisp a little more than halfway in the matter of mending the broken friendship. A week later he accepted old Mrs. Crisp's invitation to supper.

Womankind had been nothing in Patch Riller's queer life, for the simple reason that no charmer had ever looked at him twice. If significant, yet covert, glances had been shot at him in Montreal, which is probably the case, he had not seen them.

But there was no chance of missing Carrie Crisp's glances. She had a good pair of eyes, and skill, evidently instinctive, of how to use them.

Patch's first sensation was one of relief at the knowledge that his face was clean and shaven. After that he felt pride at her obvious admiration; and later in the evening he lost track of his sensations.

"I didn't know they was like that," he said to himself on his way home; and for the first time in his experience he thought slightly of Napoleon, and the dogs, and the raccoon.

He supped again with the Crisps two days later, and yet again three days after that. On the fifteenth of August he found himself engaged to be married to Carrie. He didn't know just how it had happened, but he was glad and proud.

V

LATE in October, on a fine morning of frost and sunshine, Patch Riller assembled pen and ink and paper on a corner of his kitchen table and, with the assistance of a dictionary which he had purchased in Montreal, wrought the following significant composition:

Mister norman Staver dear Friend. I been studying on some thing the last two three weeks or more. I got myself promised to a lady last august which same I writ you once all ready. But this is some thing different you can bet a dollar on it.

I sure lived a dogs life ever since that date as the saying is only worse. She wont leave me smoke my old pipe nor eat like I used to. I might as well be in montreal and done with it the way I got to shave every day and put on my best pants. She told me to build a big house and the cellar is dug of same all ready and the foundations is built.

She warned me she wont leave my tame coon

live in the new house like he does in the old house. She throwed hot water at one of my dogs only she missed him and scalded her mas foot for which God be prazed. And she says napoleon which is my horse and a real good horse would be better dead.

She wont eat pan cakes nor leave me eat them neither but pies and such. She is a good looker all right all right but she dont feel the same about me. I over hear her by chance say to her brother Dell one day I hope to God the old fool dont last long after the wedding. So I reckon its my money she wants.

So what I want you to do my Friend is will you write a letter to me with bad news in it about how my money was lost. Put it strong in regular lawyer words how there aint a dollar left which had ought to scare her off. She is too masterly and high handed for your obliged Client James Riller.

Yours truly

PATCH.

She aims to marry me soon as the new house is finished. So the sooner you write to me and tell how all my money is fell down a hole or some thing the better for your sincere and obliged Client and Friend James Riller.

Patch posted the letter himself. Soon after that, inclement weather put a stop to the work on the new house. He paid off the workmen, who were from Millville.

His spirits showed marked improvement at about this time. He laughed a great deal during his daily calls on his intended, and even cracked a few feeble jokes; and when Paul Crimmen sang one evening, Patch insisted on singing also.

Mr. Crimmen was an insurance agent, with headquarters at Millville. His buttoned boots and fountain pens proclaimed him what he was.

At the supper table he ignored his knife as completely as Patch ignored his fork. Although he had insured the lives of all the males of the Crisp family in October, he continued his weekly visits far into November—right up to the twenty-third, to be exact.

At noon of the twenty-fifth day of November, Dell Crisp found Patch busy over a griddle and a frying pan.

"I got somethin' to tell ye, Patch—but ye might's well finish yer dinner first," Dell said.

He shared Patch's dinner. Pancakes of the right sort, served with fresh pork fried in small cubes are not to be ignored on a bleak November day. Crisp ate his share in spite of the fact that he paused often to gaze anxiously at his host. When he pushed his plate away at last, and lit one of Patch's big Montreal cigars, he looked absolutely unhappy.

"What's the good news?" Patch asked, lighting up his rank pipe.

"Tain't good," Crisp answered. "Here's a letter come for ye day before yesterday. I got it at the post office, an' Carrie opened it by mistake—kind of by accident."

He handed over the letter, which read:

DEAR MR. RILLER:

It is my unhappy duty to inform you that the firm of Bundell, Staver and Bundell, your attorneys, has ceased its activities in Montreal. The senior Bundell is demised of his own hand, and the other members of the late firm have disappeared with all funds connected with their business, trust and other, including your capital—or, to be more exact, with whatever may have been left of them and it after years of wild and unwarranted speculation.

I am strongly of the opinion that, even in case of the apprehension and arrest of the absconders, virtually nothing of the funds concerned will be recovered.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Yours sincerely,

W. K. SMITHERS.

P. S.—Please understand that this communication is not a reply to yours to Norman Staver dated October 27.

This, I regret to say, is a statement of actual facts.

W. K. S.

Patch read it slowly, spelling out each word. He mulled over the postscript a half dozen times.

"An' that ain't all," Dell announced.

Patch reread the postscript and wagged his head.

"That ain't all of it," Dell continued.

"Do ye mind Paul Crimmen?"

Patch nodded, but did not lift his glance from the paper in his hand.

"Him an' Carrie—they run off together."

Then Patch looked up.

"Run off together? How far'd they run?"

"Clear to Fredericton—an' got married. Leastways, that's what she said they was goin' to do."

"She'd know, I reckon. If she said so, I reckon it's so," Patch declared.

"I guess so. I feel real mean about it, Patch. She ain't treated ye right, an' that's a fact. It's hard on a man to lose all his money, but it's harder losin' his girl, I guess—one right a top 'tother like that."

"It sure is," Patch agreed. "But I ain't got to finish the new house."

After Dell's departure, Patch went far into the woods with a spade and pick, and dug in the ground. From the deep hole he lifted a tin canister with a tight cover, and from it he extracted a roll of bank notes as thick as his right arm.

He transferred two bills from the treasure trove to his pocket, then returned the roll to the canister and put it back in the deep hole. He replaced the earth and moss with great care.

"I reckon what I got there's more use to me nor a million on paper," he said to his attentive dogs. "It 'll keep us a mighty long time in 'baccy an' tea an' ca'tridges for the old rifle—as much as thirty year, maybe."

"An' it's safe. Lawyers couldn't find it there, nor fire couldn't burn it, nor the smartest female on Bent Brook couldn't smell it out. But ye can't hide away a million."

"The way I figger it, I be better off now nor I was three days back. Now them Crisps will leave me be."

"An' no more shavin' an' no more fancy victuals for this old batch'. I always was fortune's favorite."

MUSIC

I SHALL make a pipe of river reed,
I shall make a horn of silver bark;
I shall play them where the cattle feed
In the green hills, calling down the lark,
Luring to me all the lowing herds,
Bidding to me all the singing birds.

I shall cut a pipe and roll a horn,
And sitting here beneath an April thorn
I'll pipe the spring-green grasses ripe;
I'll blow the primroses aglow;
And piping low at dusk I'll play
Your feet awake, your heart away.

Gostwick Roberts

Classified

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE ROMANCE OF A PROFESSIONAL FIGHTING MAN WHO DISCOVERS THAT OUTSIDE THE RING THERE IS A CROOKED REFEREE NAMED CASTE

By Charles Francis Coe

AT one end of the street on which Thomas Ratigan was born there stood a huge gas house. Along the sides of the highway leading toward this ugly edifice were rows of old tenements.

The people who lived in this slum district had become accustomed to the raucous voice of constant traffic over cobblestones. They worked hard by day, and on pleasant nights sat along the iron steps that led upward into dingy, gas-lit halls. There they spoke of their private affairs, and of the rise of the ward politician and, later, of the pugilistic fame of Thomas Ratigan.

For Tommy was chosen by destiny to attain eminence. As a child he dominated the gutters in which he played. As a boy, he feared no other lad in the neighborhood, and was smiled upon by the girls for his fighting prowess.

He was not a bully. His fists were much more apt to be raised in the cause of fairness than in that of victory by fair means or foul.

Life itself was not good to Tommy. He left school at the age of twelve, his father taking him out that he might go to work. His first job was as a runner on the docks.

Later young Ratigan became a call boy for the railroad. It was in this job that his fighting powers blossomed.

Although he was much among grown men, his fists quickly gave him a standing. He was a natural born fighter, was Thomas, and in the thick of the fray there was a smile on his lips and a wild fire of exultation in his eyes.

Yet it could not be said that the youth was one to pick a fight. He had many friends. It was simply that he never avoid-

ed battle, and had an inborn delight in his ability to thump each and every head presented.

His mother was a goodly soul, whose existence was common to her kind. Between the washtub and the kitchen stove her youthful beauty had been laid upon the altar of family sacrifice. Fate had scorned her and exacted the full payment of poverty.

Thomas had seven brothers and two sisters. Home life, in such tenement quarters as his father could provide, was meager. The lad took to the less crowded street, and there grew into boyhood and young manhood. Great physical strength came to him without rime or reason. He was just naturally brawny, which, because of his love of battling, was fortunate for him.

Thomas Ratigan early got his idea of making a fortune in the squared circle of pugilism from an incident on the railroad. He was standing, one day, on the platform of the freight office when a westbound express arrived.

Every one paused to watch the train pass. The thing was an expression of the cumulative ability of all the vast army of railroad workers. They revered it.

The engine was a lusty-lunged creation, with a beautiful brass plate on its face. The Pullmans were always clean to a shining degree, and the club car, the last of the train, had an observation platform railed with highly polished brass.

The train stopped near the freight house platform for water and coal. Sometimes the engineer or the fireman would lean from the cab and wave a hand. The bell would ring cheerfully, and a decisive blast of the whistle would emphasize matters.

Thomas usually looked at the observation platform. People of a different world were to be seen there.

They were rich, of course, else how could they be there? He liked to look at rich people, and tried to imagine what their lives must be, and how it felt to have plenty of money to spend.

This day the observation platform was crowded more than usual, but young Ratigan instantly recognized a famous prize-fighter as its commanding figure. There the champion stood, his face set in a battered smile, one ear noticeably cauliflowered. His clothes were cut and fitted to perfection.

The passengers around the fighting man were curious about him. They fawned upon him, men and women alike, and Thomas, the onlooker, was duly impressed.

The boy stood in awe, a light of adoration in his eyes. Presently the great man caught sight of the lad on the platform.

"Hello, kid!" he greeted, his strong teeth showing in a broad smile.

"Hello!" Thomas managed to gasp. Then he turned away in humiliation, for the people were smiling at his surprise and discomfiture.

But the incident remained in his mind, and the time came when he told himself that he would not have hesitated to fight that man. Yet he was a champion, a ring hero—with fine clothes and lots of money.

As nearly as Thomas Ratigan could see, this champion was the same as any other man. It dawned upon him that, after all, no man is vastly different than his fellows. The thought stayed with him.

That night, when he went home for his dinner, he ate in silence, a great dream incubating in his youthful mind. When the meal was done he went out into the street and walked toward the gas house where the gang would be.

Little Annie Dolan was sitting on her front steps, and her face was a smiling welcome.

"Hello, Tommy," she said coyly. "I bet you knew I was here!"

"Did not," Thomas protested stoutly. "I was goin' down with the gang, that's all."

Annie pouted and turned away, but her eyes were at a slant for fear he might pass on. But Thomas paused and leaned against the iron rail of the steps.

"I seen the champ'een to-day," he said

suddenly. "Ridin' on the express, he was."

"Champ'een—champ'een what?" Annie asked.

"Champ'een fighter, of course. What 'd you think? Gee, goils is mutts!"

"They ain't either, Tommy Ratigan; you better not say that!"

"Champ'een of all the woild!" he remarked, heedless of her reprimand. But he noticed that she slid along the step to make room for him, and he sat down.

In true feminine fashion she sought to assuage the ire of this lover.

"I bet he couldn't beat you!" she declared.

"Him?" Thomas scoffed at her. "Don't be foolish! He's champ'een of the woild. I'm in the woild, ain't I? He's champ'een over me same as he is over everybody else."

"He ain't never licked you," she maintained stoutly. "I heard you was a terrible fighter, Tommy."

"Goils don't know nothin'!" very young Mr. Ratigan retorted.

But in his mind there remained the strange thought which a view of the champion had implanted there. After all, the man was the same as every one else. Thomas had marveled at that fact—and the champion really hadn't licked Thomas! Not that there was anything in that, but—

"Why do you always go with the gang?" Annie asked, interrupting his musing.

"Ain't no place else to go," he said listlessly. His mind was occupied with observation platforms and fine clothes and champions.

"Stay here with me, Tommy," the girl coaxed. "I like you."

"Sure," he grunted. "Why shouldn't you?"

"Why should I? I don't like everybody!"

"I'm Tommy Ratigan!" he replied expansively. "I licked every kid in school, an' now I'm woikin' on the railroad. I'm fourteen years old, too."

"Well, I'm twelve. You ain't so smart, Tommy Ratigan!"

Once again the girl turned away and pouted, but Thomas did not leave. He sat there, his face solemn, his eyes seeing afar the fruition of an adolescent dream. *Champion!*

Darkness settled over the street. The gas house faded into the deepening shad-

ows, and the two on the steps managed to sidle closer together. Suddenly the girl reached over and caught Tommy's hand.

"I do like you, Tommy Ratigan," she announced firmly. "I bet I even love you!"

"I bet you do, too," the lad agreed modestly. "I bet there's lots of girls that do!"

"I bet there ain't!" Annie snapped.

But there was a hint of fear in her tone, and she clung rather desperately to his hand. After awhile she leaned closer, and her head rested against his shoulder.

"And I bet," she challenged, "you're afraid to kiss me!"

"I am not!" he asserted vehemently.

She held her face nearer. He ran the back of his hand over his lips speculatively. For a second he hesitated, then he awkwardly kissed her childish mouth.

"Goils," he muttered, "is all darn fools!"

The girl laughed happily, cuddled close against him, and with both of her hands gripped his arm.

"You know, Tommy Ratigan," she said at last, "I even bet we'll get married some time when we're big."

"Huh! I bet we won't," he grumbled. "Champ'eens don't have no wives. They're too busy lickin' guys."

"Champ'eens? You going to be a champ'een, Tommy Ratigan?"

He flushed. He had let the cat out of the bag; his dream had expressed itself in words, and he was terribly ashamed.

"Don't you be tellin' anybody I said that, Annie Dolan," he warned her. "I'll make you wish you hadn't!"

She did not take the threat lightly. Instead, she drew even closer and pressed her cherub face against his cheek.

"I won't tell anybody, Tommy," she promised. "You bet I won't. We'll just keep it all secret till you're champ'een—then we'll get married!"

The willingness of Thomas Ratigan to fight increased after that night. By the time he was sixteen he was boxing in amateur events at an uptown club. He lost some decisions, but he won a good many fights by knock-outs. Men wise in the game said that he "might have something."

On the street leading to the gas house his fame grew. The man who ran the saloon on the corner declared that Tommy

was a real prospect, and that, with proper handling, he would make good in the ring.

The gang at the gas house was proud of him. His father would lean on the bar at the corner saloon and prophesy great things for his son.

Annie Dolan remained his girl. It really meant very little to Thomas, this love affair. Annie was always around, and she was pretty and sweet, and she loved him, and told everybody that she did.

But after all the girl did not matter much. Why, Tommy asked himself, shouldn't she love him? Look who he was!

Any honest fighter will tell you that the way to learn fighting is to fight. Tommy Ratigan learned in just that way.

By the time he was eighteen he won the middleweight honors in his district, and went to another city to battle for the colors of the uptown club. At twenty he won the national amateur championship, and offers came to him from fight managers urging him to turn professional under their direction.

Every time he had a black eye or a split lip, Annie Dolan was worried. Her fingers would rub away much of the hurt, but Tommy did not realize the reason. He just liked to be with her. Annie was a very nice girl.

She had grown pretty, too. At eighteen she was the pride of the cobblestone street, and all the young men wanted to take her to the theater and dances. But Annie let it be known that she was Tommy Ratigan's girl, and after that the young men let her alone.

Tommy had his first professional fight at twenty-one. He met a lad from across the big town, and feeling ran high. The gas house street was well represented in the gallery of the arena, and that night there was joy in the tenements, for Ratigan won the bout in less than three rounds.

Then the lad had his first taste of hero worship. It went to his head somewhat. He lorded it over the other youths along the street, and his attitude toward Annie became even more casual.

The girl appeared not to notice the gesture. She loved this strapping young fighter with the devotion that makes of a kitchen stove or a washtub an instrument to express a woman's sacrifice.

The new fighter started toward championship heights. He fought often and

well. His reputation and his earnings grew. He became a man among men; then a man above men.

And Annie Dolan, her eyes wells of love and her pretty face a picture of happiness and pride, adored Tommy Ratigan both as man and fighter.

II

POSSESSING the ingredients of success, a man may climb quickly. Thomas Ratigan soon became a name to inspire respect in ring affairs.

The fighter placed himself under the management of Shorty Welch, who knew the game outside the ring as well as inside it. He explained many little tricks to Tommy. He had the lad box with veteran glove men, and they, too, taught him much.

In the six months after his first professional appearance he boxed seven times and won seven victories. For these efforts he earned several hundred dollars for himself.

Shorty, with the vision of experience, selected his man's opponents. He took into consideration the style of each one that Tommy fought, the punch he carried, and the chances against his beating Welch's new phenomenon. In short, Ratigan was built into a drawing card by giving to him the opposition that he could easily beat.

The time came when Tommy appeared in a semifinal bout. This was his first step upward, and he met the best man he had thus far been called upon to subdue. The match was talked of a great deal in the gas house street, and Annie Dolan was much worried by what the newspapers had to say of the prowess of the fighter that Tommy was to meet.

But Shorty Welch was smart. He knew the type of boxer that Tommy looked best against.

The gas house lad won his first semifinal bout rather handily. The newspapers gave him a good deal of space, and prophesied for him a brilliant future under Shorty's guidance.

That night Tommy collected two hundred and eighty dollars for his share, and it was more money than he ever before had owned at one time. He ordered a tailor-made suit, and bought a light gray cap. His raiment was considered, on the cobblestone street, the last word in style.

He took Annie Dolan to a dance, and they were the attraction of the evening.

Annie was working; she was a stenographer, and her savings had gone largely into the gown she wore at Ratigan's side.

"I knew you'd be a champion, Tommy, dear," she whispered to him as they danced. "I'm as proud as I can be!"

"I ain't no champ; not yet," he protested mildly. "But I guess I'm makin' a good start. Shorty was tellin' me that I'll work in a main bout over in Joisey pretty soon."

He felt her supple body draw closer to him as he spoke, and her blue eyes gazed upward into his own with an adoration that even he could not mistake. He laughed a bit carelessly.

Annie and her love had become an institution with him; a thing to be accepted as fact and nothing else. She was nice to have around. She made other fellows jealous, and added to the fame and glory that already were Tommy Ratigan's in the gas house district.

"You'll be famous, Tommy!" she sighed happily. "I'm so glad. It must be wonderful to have people look at you as every one does. I bet it makes you happy even if you don't admit it."

"A guy like me can't duck that stuff, Annie," he explained loftily. "You know everybody's gettin' to hear about me."

"Of course—and they should. You are a great man, Tommy. I always knew you would be, so it doesn't surprise me."

He laughed again; careless merriment that seemed so inadequate a response to her wondrous love. Annie did not exactly understand what was meant by it. But the possibility that Tommy did not love her with the same completeness that characterized her love for him, never occurred to her.

Tommy, she knew, was a great man, and all great men were strange in some ways. But she loved him with a wildness and a calmness combined. Her whole life centered in this rising prize fighter, and his every move became highly important in her life.

"You'll make lots more than two or three hundred dollars for your fights now," she said. "After awhile money will come in so fast you can hardly count it, I bet."

"Sure; I s'pose so."

"Then you can ride on observation platforms and speak to kids beside freight houses," she giggled. "Remember that night when you kissed me the first time,

Tommy? Remember when you saw the champion on the train?"

"He ain't champ'een no more," Tommy corrected her. "He got knocked bow-legged three years ago."

The words dampened the girl's enthusiasm. It seemed that she had caught a portent from them.

"Nobody is ever champion very long, is he, Tommy?" she sighed.

He did not answer, but she felt his arms tighten about her as they danced. It was as if he made a gesture of defiance against the fate of all professional fighting men.

"I hope you'll be champion soon," the girl declared tenderly. "We'll be married when you are champion, yes, Tommy?"

She looked up at him eagerly, and her beauty was a thing which should have impressed any man. Annie Dolan had blue eyes, blond hair, a tender and sensitive mouth, and in her face there was the mystic touch of the romantic island that gave her forbears birth.

"Why are you always talkin' about gettin' married, Annie?" Tommy demanded coolly.

"Because I love you," she answered simply.

"Well, I love you, too. But I ain't always talkin' about it, am I? I got lots of big things to do first."

Heedless of all the other dancers, she raised herself in his arms and pursed her lips for a kiss. Laughingly he lifted her clear of the floor and their lips met. After that the girl appeared content.

Tommy got his chance to fight in a main bout in Jersey. He met a veteran whose fighting ability, as the smart Shorty well knew, had faded. Tommy won, but only after a bitter struggle in which the loser taught him much of ring tactics.

The next day the sports writers stated candidly that Tommy Ratigan was less of a fighter than common opinion credited him with being. Their belief was that the veteran should have been knocked out by the youth. Tommy had failed to do this, and therefore he lacked the qualities of the truly great in the squared circle.

Annie read that criticism, and Tommy felt ashamed when she spoke of it. He had a frank desire to punch the heads of the men who wrote disparagingly of his skill.

But it proved a lesson to him. He became more vicious in his fights, and strove

with everything he had for knock-outs. He got several more main bouts during the next few months, and he won them all decisively.

"We'll grab off a chance here in the big town if you keep on goin' so good," Shorty Welch assured him. "We're lookin' real dough right in the face, Tommy."

When Ratigan had been a professional fighter for a year his big chance came, and he made good. His purses grew rapidly thereafter, and he saved all the money that he did not need for expenses.

There was much publicity arranged for him. His pictures appeared in the papers often, along with stories about his life.

But these chronicles never mentioned Annie Dolan, the girl that Tommy was to marry. Slowly it dawned upon the stenographer that her lover was apt to outgrow her.

At first the pangs of jealousy gripped her hard. But she cast them out of her heart, determined to find her joy in the success of the man she loved.

As Tommy's ring importance grew, his time became more completely filled with affairs outside Annie's knowledge. Only occasionally did he take her out. His hours were devoted to training on the road and in the gymnasium, and conferences with the men who spoke only the language of the ring.

Tommy always bent down for a kiss when he met Annie, but she sensed that the caress was becoming mechanical. She caught a hint of the change in Thomas Ratigan.

He had stepped out of her world. There was no reason why he should continue to live on the street of the cobblestones; he had money enough to do as he pleased. For a time she drew happiness from the belief that he continued to live at home because of her.

Then the realization came to her that he remained only because there he was king. Had it not been for the adulation of his lifelong friends, and of the people of the gas house section, Tommy Ratigan would long since have left his home.

A great unhappiness assailed the girl. If she sensed this thing in Tommy, others surely had. And she had thrown herself at the man, proclaiming freely and openly her love for him and her intention of marrying him.

Their affairs marked time for two or

three months. Tommy's earnings right then were ten times the average of the hard-working street dwellers.

If he really loved Annie, and wanted to marry her, he would come to her and say so. She determined to find out from him just how he felt.

The opportunity for a talk came one evening after Tommy took her to a movie theater. It was on the way home, traversing lonely streets, that the girl decided to open her heart to the man she loved. He would have to talk frankly, too.

"Tommy," she said softly, "you really don't love me, do you?"

"Sure, I love you! Why do you start gabbin' about that right away?" he demanded testily.

"Sweethearts usually find love a good thing to talk about, Tommy," she replied, her voice heavy with hurt.

"Aw, I love you, Annie. Honest to Gawd, I do!" he growled. "But I'm different from most guys. I'm a fighter, an' everybody knows me, an' I'm famous. I got a lot on my mind."

The girl did not reply immediately. Her fingers gripped a little tighter about his arm as they walked, and she kept her gaze on the sidewalk. She appeared to be summoning all her courage, and when she spoke it was with great tensility.

"I understand," she said. "You're a great man, and I'm only little me. I see how it is, Tommy. I don't blame you a bit. Why should you bother with a girl like me? We've been wrong about each other—that's all."

"It ain't that!" he snapped, anger in his tones. "What have I done to make you think I don't love you? I do love you. Honest, I do, Annie."

They walked in silence for a little distance, then Annie, her voice still tense with feeling, said:

"There are two things I want to say to you, Tommy. The first one is to save some of your money. You throw it all away, Tommy. You could have a good home on what you make. The second one is this: I love you, and I always will love you—and any time you want me—you can—come and—get me!"

Before he realized what was happening she had raised herself on tiptoe and kissed him, fiercely. Then, while a sharp retort was on his lips, she whirled and ran away. He stood, baffled, and watched her until

she disappeared into the hall of her tenement home.

He was not happy. He did love Annie Dolan, he told himself, but he certainly was not going to chase any girl!

At his home he found an excited Shorty Welch.

"Publicity!" Shorty announced in his finest managerial tone. "Boy! Some break! You an' me go to a swell blow-out down on a Long Island estate. This is real stuff, Tommy; none of these showcase bimbos gettin' by on their nerve and credit. To-morrow mornin' a car calls for us an' takes us down to the estate of old man Eggers—you know him? Mr. Blandon T. Eggers? Well, he ain't nothin' but president of the Down Town National Bank!"

"An' what do we do there, Shorty?" Ratigan demanded, averse to any idea that did not plainly spell fight.

"We box four rounds at a garden party this bird is givin'. It's an exhibition—nobody socked hard enough to notice—an' we drag down a simple thousand bucks for our end of the show!"

"Exhibition? Who with?" Tommy asked, his interest now keen at the prospect.

"Oh, some guy. What's the difference who? He'll be playin' the same racket we are. He gets dough, too."

"Sure—I don't mean that—but I was wonderin', that's all. How'd you come to knock off a soft thing like this, Shorty?"

Welch thumped himself on his chest.

"Publicity! I'm here to tell the cock-eyed world that publicity 'll do anything on earth. This old guy saw your picture in the paper, an' he gets at me through Hal Downs, the sport editor. Be ready with your gear in a bag at ten to-morrow mornin'. Mebbe they'll ast us to stay over the week-end, huh?"

Shorty Welch left with a happy smile on his face. A thousand dollars for an exhibition—a private one, at that!

Suddenly there recurred to Tommy that first time he had seen a champion, on the observation platform of the express. That fighter had been surrounded by rich people.

Now Thomas Ratigan was going to the haunts of the wealthy. An estate—a bank president—a thousand dollars—

That night Tommy laid out his best clothes. As he viewed himself in the bureau mirror, he was obliged to confess that

his broad shoulders and his mighty arms made a worth while picture.

III

THE next morning there came to the door of Tommy's tenement such a motor car as would delight even the people who ride on observation platforms. A uniformed chauffeur alighted and took the fighter's somewhat battered bag and stowed it carefully in the rear of the limousine.

He then stood aside and waved Ratigan into the car. The rich man's servant had the same look of hero worship which Tommy had come to associate with his gas house admirers.

"We go right down to the office, Mr. Ratigan," he said respectfully. "I saw you paste that big Swede from the West Side. What a trimming you gave him!"

Tommy shrugged with his best air of nonchalance and settled back against the cushions while the envious eyes of the neighborhood watched him from vantage points. The ride down town through the traffic jams of Fifth Avenue was a delight to him. He was delighted to have the car stop so that people could look in upon him.

Outside the Down Town National Bank the huge car came to a gentle halt, and a uniformed doorman assured the chauffeur that he would announce its presence to Blandon Eggers. At that moment Shorty Welch appeared, a broad grin on his face.

"You look like quick cash in there, Tommy," he declared. "Where's the rest of the gang, shover?"

"Mr. Eggers will be right out," the driver replied.

"I guess I'll be ridin' up front with you," Shorty said condescendingly. "I like to spit when I smoke, an' this 'll be quite a ride."

It proved fortunate that he made that decision, for when Blandon Eggers appeared, he was not alone. At his side, clinging to his arm, swayed a girl, her slight figure an enticement of youthful loveliness. Ratigan looked once, then twice, then continuously.

She was not only a pretty girl, but vibrant, her cheeks glowing, her eyes bright with anticipation of whatever life offered her. As they neared the car she glanced up and smiled to Tommy.

"I'm sure," the girl laughed merrily, as the chauffeur opened the door, "that this is Tommy Ratigan in person."

"Nobody else," Tommy smiled back. "Who are you? Where did we—"

"This is Ratigan, Mildred," the gray-haired banker interrupted. "Ratigan, my daughter Mildred. It is she who arranged this boxing affair. Nixon, you might fix those rugs a little better."

The driver slipped through the door and straightened the seat rugs more comfortably. Then Mildred Eggers entered the car and quite frankly sat close to Tommy Ratigan.

"Daddy," she said to her father, "you like to have the ash receiver near at hand, and I like to sit beside men like Mr. Ratigan—how big you are! You must be frightfully strong!"

The banker smiled to himself and lit a cigar with the electric lighter set into the side of the upholstery.

"I'm pretty strong, I guess," Tommy admitted slowly.

There was a fascinating perfume about this slip of a girl; an animation in her mood that was not to be denied. Her lips were chiseled to lines of perfection, and her eyes flaunted a different shade, Tommy imagined, with each passing thought in her active mind.

"You'd really have to be strong to stand this boxing," she said. "Daddy thinks I'm terrible to like boxing, but I do—I love it! Why be born a man if you cannot fight? That's what I say!"

"Sure!" Tommy agreed.

He was feeling a growing embarrassment. When she reached upward to poke a wayward strand of hair back under her little hat, her arm rubbed against his, and he had a nervous impulse to draw away.

There was another thing. These people were vastly different from his kind. It was not that they were better, perhaps not as good, but they were indisputably different. They thought in strange channels, and some of their words he never had heard before.

They had an air about them, a worldly confidence and understanding that worried him. How could girls possibly know as much as Mildred Eggers obviously knew? He did not understand sophistication, and he was a little overcome by it.

"You are the first prize fighter I ever met," the girl went on, her eyes turning frankly upward to his. "I've hardly been able to wait for the time to come! There are a thousand things I should be seeing

to down home, but I made daddy let me come in to town just so I could ride back with you and get acquainted before we had so many guests around."

She paused a moment and then demanded:

"There! Aren't you proud?"

"You bet!" Tommy admitted, uncertainly. "Yeah, proud." He finished the speech with a somewhat inane smile.

"You should have said so without being asked, young man!"

"I guess I was goin' to," he apologized.

Blandon Eggers laughed throatily. The girl impulsively laid her hand on Tommy's arm and said:

"Never mind, Mr. Ratigan. Don't let daddy worry you by his laughing. I know what he means."

"I mean," Eggers stated matter of factly, "that our young friend is in for a tough journey if you keep after him as you are!"

"He is not!" the girl protested. "He loves to have me talk with him; I know he does. Don't you—Tommy?"

"Yeah! Sure!"

Tommy really did like the conversation. He hoped she would do all the talking, for he could think of nothing to be said that he would care to offer. It was much better, he was sure, to sit back and answer such questions as the girl might ask.

"And I'm going to talk, too!" she announced. "Tommy is to stay down over the week-end. I know every one will want to meet him."

Ratigan caught a quick glance from Eggers, beyond the girl, and there was a quizzical smile on the banker's face.

Mildred pretended that her father did not approve of her sudden invitation, and she used this pretense to grip Tommy's arm sympathetically. At the same time she assured them both that it was her party, and she liked Tommy very much, and would insist that he remain.

Ratigan was disturbed by her pressure against him; contact with her was awesome to him; he had never felt like that before.

This girl was so unlike Annie Dolan. It would have been easy to talk with Annie, who, in truth, did very little talking, but was a flattering success as a listener.

The first show of temper he had ever seen in her was that manner in which she had left him the night before. He could

handle Annie, all right—but this Mildred Eggers!

There was another problem. The rich girl talked so frankly, and her ideas were so foreign to Tommy's understanding of women. But he liked her; he was charmed by her. She kept him uneasy and uncertain, and every time he looked at her he found her more desirable.

Presently Mildred removed her gloves and opened a little vanity bag. From this she extracted a jeweled cigarette case, and soon her beautiful lips were puffing as unconcernedly as her dad's.

Somehow Tommy hated to see her smoke—but he had to admit that she did it beautifully. He foolishly envied the cigarette that made contact with her pouting lips and the spirals of blue smoke that sifted from her fine nostrils.

But he did not like to see her smoke—he was quite certain of that. A girl on the tenement street who smoked was— He hurriedly switched his thoughts from that kind. Yes, he hated to see Miss Eggers smoking.

"I love strength," she was saying in her liveliest manner. She was holding the cigarette in her dainty left hand, and her right had promptly snuggled back under his arm. "I love it! If I were a man I think I would try to be a fighter, too. Most men are so pudgy and fat and soft—a business life does that, I imagine. I'd ride and box and race, and do everything I could to build up my strength. I love big, strong men!"

Her hand gripped Ratigan's arm as she spoke, and he sensed that there was a little secret between them. He saw nothing strange in the fact that she admired him.

He was, of course, a man to be admired. Annie felt the same way as Mildred. He supposed all women were like this where a fighter was concerned.

They crossed the bridge over the river and into Queens, and the driver now was able to make better time. The great car whirled over the road with a luxurious swaying that Tommy adored.

Shorty, from the front seat, peered back, his face alight with pleasure. He winked happily to Tommy.

The fighter had the feeling that the motor was transporting him into a new world. It was a world of wonders, where men and women were different, and one's slightest

desire might be converted into law by dollars that were eager to obey any command.

This girl, Mildred Eggers, certainly was different. After all, what if she did smoke? Lots of fine women smoked, he supposed.

It was just a matter of that different world. If Annie Dolan did not smoke, well, she was of another world, and she had not contrived to lift herself out of it, as Tommy Ratigan had.

Soon the car was spinning along the wide highway below Jamaica. Blandon Eggers leaned toward the speaking tube and suggested to the driver that they use the motor boulevard and thus save time.

From the time they passed through the gate onto the private highway, Tommy took a keener joy in the ride. There they were safe, and there was no policing. The road was smooth, and wound through rolling land thick with shrubbery one moment and revealing a velvety golf fairway the next.

Nixon sent the big car's speedometer up to forty-five miles, and the country whirled by them in a panorama of wonderment to Tommy. It was glorious. Here, indeed, was the world of the rich, and, for a time at least, he was a part of it.

"Do you golf, Tommy?" Mildred Eggers asked. "I hope you do. I'd love a round with you. I'm not so bad either; I did a hundred and four at our club the other day and we were playing the back tees, too."

"Nope. I never golfed," Tommy admitted ruefully.

At that point he noticed that Shorty was peering back at them again, his face still alight with satisfaction.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I'd love to play with you. What a ball you would hit after you got the timing of the swing! That strength of yours—those shoulders—They would have to change the game if you ever took it up, Tommy!"

She laughed merrily at the thought, and Ratigan joined in. He was beginning to see that this girl took every opportunity to praise him.

He liked her for that; he was glad she was the sort who could see fine qualities in a man. But he was still a little afraid of her. Should he call her Mildred, as she called him Tommy?

"If the old man wasn't here," he thought to himself, "I'd chance it!"

"Wait until Denny Brod meets you!"

the girl exclaimed. "Denny thinks he is quite a specimen of manhood, Tommy. He's a friend of ours, and he boxes quite a lot, and plays polo; a good enough lad and a good athlete, too—but nothing like you!"

"No, I guess not," Tommy managed to state.

Blandon Eggers glanced at him again, and Tommy wondered from the expression on the banker's face whether he had said the right thing.

From ahead, Shorty's smile peered back once more. Tommy had seen that face at the ring side too often not to know when its owner was pleased with the way things were progressing.

Shorty was delighted right now, and Tommy wondered why.

Doubtless it was because of the enjoyment his manager was getting from the ride. Shorty did not have to talk with these different people; he was, Tommy knew, not feeling the strange embarrassment that gripped himself.

They left the highway after running twenty miles, and soon turned off the main road into an arched entrance that led across a vast lawn studded with shrubs.

"Here we are," Mildred Eggers laughed gayly. "We made excellent time. You should thank Nixon, daddy; a dandy driver! You see, this going to town did not delay me a bit, and I wouldn't give up the ride down for anything. Would you, Tommy?"

"No, siree!" Tommy replied heartily, relieved that they would now quit the car and he could have Shorty closer at hand to help him. Shorty always knew just what to say.

"I certainly wouldn't have missed it—Millie!" the fighter added.

The girl, already out of the car and standing on the steps of the wide, pillared entrance, laughed in delight. Her father uttered his throaty mirth once more. Mildred caught Tommy's arm and smiled up at him.

"Atta boy, Tommy!" she declared. "You are doing famously. Kraft will show you gentlemen where you will sleep, for I have made up my mind that you must stay. Kraft will see that you get anything you want, and we'll all meet downstairs in, say, an hour."

She squeezed Tommy's arm once more, and when he stooped to reach for his bag

he found that Kraft was before him. A little dazed, he followed the bowing servant. Shorty brought up the rear.

Tommy did not miss the radiant smile that the girl threw him as she left. He felt that he had done right in calling her Millie. It was not as "high-hat" as "Mildred!"

Shorty tripped over a rug, but otherwise managed to trail Kraft to their quarters. There they stood in mute wonder. "Wow!" Shorty managed to remark after a time. "Jever see a joint like this in all your life?"

"No!" Tommy confessed. "Ain't it a knock-out?"

"An' that gal," Shorty went on. "You seen me givin' you the office from the front seat? Ain't she the winner, kid? An' stuck on you! Dead gone! Dames is that way; they sure admire strong guys that fight. Kid, if you can knock off a skirt like that, we're set for life!"

IV

THAT was a week-end which Tommy Ratigan would never forget. Between his embarrassment and the continuous thrills that came to him, he was in a mental tempest. Shorty Welch escaped the embarrassment only.

The guests were all of the world of wealth, and the girls were much like Mildred Eggers, although none was so pretty. Mildred was the dynamo of the party. Tommy learned that the girl had no mother, and he saw that her father was completely under her thumb.

The gentlemen of the party soon gathered around Shorty, who kept them amused with his stories of the ring. The ladies gravitated toward Tommy, a surprising situation which kept him harassed.

They were dainty, yet so smart; pretty, yet so worldly wise and self-sufficient. He suspected that they knew more than he did; that they guided the conversation, and looked upon him as a sort of curio. That is, all did but Millie.

Shorty had encouraged Tommy a great deal. The manager, in his abrupt and crude way, was generally right in his deductions, and he had stated that Millie was stuck on Tommy. The fighter could understand that she would be, and he took the statement as fact.

It strengthened him in talking with the girl, but he could not rid himself of his

fear of the strange girls he met. They overwhelmed him.

Until late afternoon Tommy stuck rather closely at Mildred Eggers's side. That appeared to please the girl, and he was certain that she was showing him off to her friends. He did not mind that, but he would have preferred to be alone with her.

"I ain't so good with these little glasses," he said, declining refreshments. "I'd rather not drink on account of my trainin'. An' these glasses 'll bust the handles off right in my big mitt, first thing I know!"

Mildred was delighted with that speech. The two found time to stroll down across the lawn to a little lake where the ring for the exhibition was pitched.

Tommy was getting back into his own world there. He climbed through the ropes and tested the flooring.

Then he tightened a turnbuckle on the middle strand, and, altogether, impressed those about the ring with his expert knowledge. After that he felt more conversational.

"Who is this guy I box, Millie?" he asked.

"Some terrible name," she told him smilingly. "He arrived a short time ago, and—ugh! I'd hate to meet him alone. Looks like a criminal. But he'll be helpless in your hands, I know that!"

"Sure!" Tommy agreed. "I'll take him easy."

Mildred took his arm as they strolled back toward the house.

"I never felt such muscle before!" she said softly, her fingers gripping.

Tommy laughed, and hardened his biceps. The process brought a gurgling surprise and delight from the girl. Tommy's chest expanded.

"I got to see Shorty an' get the lay of this scheme," he explained. "We're s'posed to go on at eight, ain't we?"

"Yes. I told daddy five, at first, but that was to get you down here early!" She laughed frankly. "You see, Tommy, I fibbed a bit to daddy. Denny Brod took me to the fights a short time ago. I saw you fight."

"You did! Well, I'll be— Well, whatcha know about that!" Tommy remarked, thinking again of what Shorty had said in connection with this girl's sentiments.

"Oh, go ahead, Tommy," she laughed,

"be 'damned,' if you like. I'm hard to shock. Modern girl, you know. I refuse to live in a shell and let life pass me by."

Tommy also laughed, but uncomfortably, and paused to hold a match for her while she lit a cigarette. He noticed her tendency to snuggle close to him and to cling to his arms.

A feeling of proprietorship gripped him; he felt as if he had quite a share in Mildred Eggers. He wished she would send these others home and just walk over the grounds with him and talk to him. He was getting accustomed to her; he liked her.

They found Shorty entertaining the men guests on a side porch that overlooked the beautiful grounds. Denny Brod smilingly came forward to meet them as they approached.

"Mil, you're a jewel!" he said laughingly. "There never was as original a stunt as this."

The girl appeared chilly toward Brod, but nevertheless Tommy could have knocked him down. But they went on to the porch, and there Shorty, his face flushed and his eyes very bright, arose to greet them.

"A slick bunch of guys, ma'am!" he proclaimed in the rôle of a happy guest. "Nice as anybody'd want to meet. We been swappin' yarns here an' havin' a swell time!"

As he spoke, Shorty reached for a glass and helped himself from a large bowl of punch that stood, among fresh roses and ferns, on the porch. Tommy wondered a little just what "kick" might be in the punch. His manager gulped down the drink and ran the back of his hand over his lips.

"I was tellin' the boys about Tommy here," he went on. "This kid is the comin' champ. Comb that out of your beard, if you can! The comin' champ—an' there ain't a thing that can stop him. He'll knock the present champ bow-legged as soon as we get him in a ring."

Ratigan did not in the least mind that sort of talk until he glanced at Mildred. There was something wrong. She was smiling, her eyes were frank, and her manner gracious, but there was a change. Her manner, if gracious, also had something of the protective air about it.

"I am finding fighters nicer than managers," she said steadily, her eyes meeting

Shorty's. But that worthy cared not for her words; he shrugged understandingly, and said:

"Sure! They all fall for Tommy. He's got a way with the gals."

There was a shout from the men assembled, and Shorty, convinced that he had said something bright, joined in the laugh. So did Mildred and Tommy, but she soon led the fighter away, and a strange silence sprang up between them.

They entered the house, and there the girl was besieged by guests to such an extent that she had to leave Tommy. He, for want of a better thing to do, went back to the little porch, sat on the rail and listened to the conversation.

Shorty did most of the talking. Any one else who spoke merely asked a question which, by its nature, led the manager to further words.

While they were there the man Tommy was to box appeared. The fellow was Knock-Out Hogan, and where his nickname came from none knew. To the best of Tommy's knowledge, Knock-Out had never won a fight.

His mind went back to what Mildred had told him. She had seen him fight before. She therefore had liked him at a distance, and planned this exhibition solely to meet him! That tied in with what Shorty had said about her, too. And now here was Hogan.

It was a certainty they were paying Hogan no thousand dollars for an exhibition. He would gladly come for a hundred, and even that was more than he was worth.

Had Mildred Eggers deliberately selected this easy opposition for Ratigan so that he might be made to look all the better in the exhibition? Was she, as Shorty said, "stuck on Tommy?"

Hogan came to him and shook hands.

"Little fancy stuff we're givin' 'em tonight, huh?" Knock-Out remarked.

"Yeah," Tommy replied.

Hogan leaned close.

"A flock of saps, Tommy," he stated. "Neither of us throws a punch, is that right? Ain't this jane that's runnin' the racket a knock-out? Boy! Must be a little nutty, too—but she's some dame. Ask me!"

The words enraged Tommy. He would have liked nothing better than to hit the leering face of Knock-Out Hogan then and there. It did not occur to him that his

feelings ran remarkably high over such a simple matter as a girl.

"Remember, now," the other fighter went on, "this is soft dough. We don't cuff each other around none, see? These guys is all chumps. They won't know no diff'rent, an' we'll take our dough an' slope. O. K.?"

Tommy nodded. After all, there was no need to make a fight of it. Hogan was a laugh in a fight with him, Tommy knew. Even if he did hate Knock-Out suddenly, why chance a broken hand just for the fun of pasting him?

Hogan laughed and joined the crowd. Tommy noticed that he drank twice of the punch, and wondered if the stuff was as potent as it appeared. Certainly it made Shorty mighty wordy.

Between that time and the hour when the lights were ablaze and the guests arranged about the ring, Tommy did some deep thinking. He had to confess that there were some big changes in his views on women. Mildred Eggers had had a tremendous effect upon him.

He contrasted her with Annie Dolan, and it was clear that the two were far apart—Mildred with her modernity and Annie with her sweet and loving simplicity.

Mildred was sylphlike. Annie was larger, and less sinuous. There was a fullness about Annie that was totally lacking in Mildred. Mildred could have worn a man's suit and appeared at home in it.

That was it; a different world, Tommy thought. Annie would never be at home here. What she wanted, he was sure, was a little house of her own, without a servant to do the work. There she could cook to her heart's content, and raise a family that would sweeten her old age.

But that was just it: Annie would get old. Mildred never would; age was impossible to consider in the same thought with Millie. She was so lively, so bright and active and—and—yes, glorious!

Ratigan hated Hogan for what he had said of her. Mildred knew more in a second than Hogan ever would suspect, he told himself. The use of her name on such lips as Hogan's struck him as a crime in itself.

And as these thoughts ran through Tommy's mind, Shorty, upon whom he planned to rely when in doubt, continued his dipping into the punch bowl and his conversational gems about the fight game.

Hogan joined him, and the young men guests stood about in varying degrees of merriment. Dinner, Tommy was told, would be served after the boxing exhibition. He was informed also that—as a reprimand to Denny Brod—he was to be seated at the right of Mildred Eggers.

That did not please him. There had been too many utensils of strange and appalling shapes on the table at luncheon. He would have liked to have Kraft bring his food to the rooms, but the young hostess would not hear of that.

At seven thirty Tommy went upstairs, and Kraft aided him to change to his ring clothes. He held aloft the purple tights with their gold monogram embroidered on the left side.

Annie had embroidered those tights. Tommy dismissed thoughts of her from his mind. It would do her good to learn that he would not go back to her after she had left him in anger.

He viewed himself before the mirror, with Kraft as an enthusiastic onlooker.

"You sure size up great, Tommy," the servant assured him, dropping all servile demeanor. To fistic fans the ring is the great leveler. The greatest of all pugilists is only "Tommy" or "Jack" or "Jim-mie" to waiter or banker, friend or stranger.

On the stairs, when Tommy started below, he pulled his vivid bathrobe close about his body and stepped softly. Uppermost in his mind was the thought that he wanted to impress Mildred Eggers that night. If what Shorty said was really true, and he could marry Millie, well, he could soon get used to all the tricks of this new world.

He stalked across the lawn to the porch where Shorty Welch still held forth to a limited audience, for most of the guests had gone to the seats about the ring.

"It's time to work, Shorty," he said sharply. "Did you fix up a bucket an' towel?"

"Me?" Shorty snorted. "Not me, kid. Kraft, my man, he done that. I just spoke to him, Tommy. Guys like us don't do nothin' when they're in a joint like this one!"

It developed that Welch was right. Kraft followed with a bucket and towel, all ready for the ring. It was clear that the man was glad of the chance to serve at the ring-side and see the exhibition.

As he moved away the folds of Tommy's bathrobe fell aside, and his deep, broad chest stood exposed. At that moment Mildred Eggers appeared and called to him. Three other girls were with her, and they all walked forward. Tommy turned, forgetful of his appearance.

Mildred was not abashed. She walked closer, caught his robe and flung it aside.

"Look!" she said to the other girls. "This is a man!"

Then she hauled the robe off so that Tommy's arms were exposed. The fighter laughed uncertainly and crooked his right arm to reveal the bunched muscles.

Mildred caught his bare arm in her slender fingers and pinched the muscle. She laughed, and repeated her assertion that he was a man.

On the way to the ring Tommy was in a partial daze. The spot on his arms where Mildred had touched him was as a fire that did not burn hurtfully.

Something snapped inside his head, and he did not hear what Shorty Welch was saying. His blood raced madly, and Mildred's face shone before his eyes. Life had suddenly become topsy-turvy.

He could not understand the girl. He could not understand himself. His whole mind was tempest driven.

V

NEVER had Tommy Ratigan climbed through the ropes with such a flood of emotion assailing him. He gave little heed to Knock-Out Hogan. The other fighter was already in his corner and staring across the ring in a suggestive manner at Tommy.

His point was easily discernible. The affair was to be an exhibition, and he did not want Ratigan to forget that pertinent fact. Tommy had promised to remember; the bout would simply be made to look good to the guests. It was of only four rounds' duration, and Shorty Welch himself was to act as referee.

The bell that called the two gladiators to action impressed Tommy merely as a sound. His mind was not in the ring; it was on Mildred Eggers, and the manner in which she had looked up into his eyes as she praised his naked muscles. There never, he was sure, had been a girl like Millie.

He knew that she loved him. That was perfectly clear. Her eyes were innocent of anything but admiration. He would

have staked his life that her heart was as pure as ever a girl's heart was.

Something of the vastness of life gripped him. He sensed that perhaps Mildred was more in love with a sheer contrast than with himself. He was strong and combative, where her other men friends were somewhat lacking in brute force, and were, instead, polished and refined. Perhaps she was tired of the very world which so thrilled him.

Knock-Out Hogan fiddled about in the center of the ring. Once he landed a right-hand blow against Tommy's shoulder, and some one applauded. There was nothing commendable about that wallop. It was to laugh!

At the end of the round Tommy had done nothing. As he walked to his chair a deep line furrowed his brow, and he looked quickly about for Mildred.

He found her eyes following his every move, and he saw, at her side, Denny Brod. Denny was not looking at him, he was watching the girl, and on his face was an expression of dawning understanding and amazement.

Tommy saw him speak to the girl, and a look of anger and chagrin overspread her face. She answered, and Denny flushed as if her words had hurt him, then turned away. A great anger caught Tommy in its vortex.

"It's me she loves," he told himself fiercely. "Just me. An' I love her, too. If it's a man she wants to see, I'll show her one!"

He dropped to his chair and glared across the ring. Hogan was smirking at him again.

He hated Hogan. He recalled heatedly the words of the fighter on the little side porch.

Knock-Out would pay for those words now. Tommy would show Mildred Eggers, and the manicured specimen at her side, just what a man was!

At the bell he met Hogan in ring center. Loud enough for all to hear, he said:

"Now fight, you woman knocker! Come to it an' show all you got. This ain't no exhibition from here on."

Knock-Out backed away in surprise. Shorty hiccuped and stepped in to interfere. But he got nowhere. Tommy had slipped into a crouch and was trailing Hogan like a panther seeking a chance to spring on its prey.

Outside the ring there was tense muttered comment. Tommy gave it no heed. Perhaps Mildred might say something, but even that did not interest him. He had determined, regardless of his agreement with Hogan, to show this wonderful girl what sort of a man he was, how chivalrous he was, and just what his formidable muscles could do.

Hogan was back against the ropes now, his battered face peering from behind his shielding forearms, and his thick lips moving noticeably as he whispered diplomatic questions. Fear was in his eyes.

Tommy could not see what frightened Hogan, or what brought those continued comments from outside the ring. It was the expression on his own face; the fire that burned in his steady eyes as he glided after his man.

He did not think of that. He was suddenly converted into an elemental man, plunged to the abysmal depths of his stone age ancestors. He was fighting, and his woman was watching him. He would show her his worth.

Hogan dodged free and covered again. He knew some of the tricks of the ring, and was using them all defensively.

His countenance showed that he could not fathom the sudden change in Ratigan. His expression was that of a man who suspects that he is being victimized by forces the existence of which he had not suspected.

Tommy swung a swishing right for the head, and the blow thudded against a forearm. Knock-Out staggered from the force of the blocked punch, and cast a suggestive glance at Shorty.

The manager was as confused by the liquid punch that he had imbibed as Hogan was by the physical one. He moved after the two boxers, and spoke softly about making the affair an exhibition.

Tommy gave him no heed whatever. There was murder in his eyes as he trailed his man.

The killing instinct of the true fighter was rampant in his every move. He made an appalling sight, a berserk picture that tightened the lips of every spectator.

Again he slashed wickedly with his right. Some one near at hand gasped at the power of the blow.

Hogan retreated constantly. Once he swept his left fist outward, but Tommy brushed it aside and darted his own left to

Knock-Out's chin. The fighter went back on his heels, reeled to the ropes, and toppled through them. Tommy caught him and pulled him back into the ring.

He gave him ample time to get set. There would be no fluke or unfair advantage about what he was going to do.

When Hogan was set, Tommy suspected his purpose, and taunted him. "Go ahead," he sneered. "Find a soft spot! Quit cold! You got the courage to criticize a girl, but you ain't got the guts to back it up."

Whether his words reached the guests about the ring he neither knew nor cared. His whole mind was centered upon one thing. He must knock out this bruiser in order to make Mildred Eggers see him at his best.

He was at home now. This was his element. All the little smiles his actions had evoked in this new world would be forgotten in the task he had set for himself.

He could not talk as did Denny Brod; he could not ride, or play golf and polo. His finger nails carried no luster or polish, and his hands were not as soft and pink as a girl's.

But he could fight! He would show them that beyond any measure of doubt.

Hogan had withered again into his frightened crouch. Furiously, Tommy closed in on him. His left hand slugged aside one of Hogan's guarding arms, and his right fist, driven with every ounce of strength and timing he could muster, shot through the opening thus made.

There was a crunching impact, and a gasp from outside the ring as the blow landed. Knock-Out's body appeared to be catapulted through the air. For a moment it caught on the top rope of the ring, hung there weirdly motionless, then gently slipped over the rope and crashed to the floor of the ring in insensibility.

Tommy whirled to his corner, a grin twisting his lips. It was a smile of victory, of pride, of conscious self-preening before the multitude.

He had shown his worth and proven his power. Before him had fallen to ignominious defeat a slugger whose prowess was unknown to the guests, but whose appearance had been rather fearful.

"There goes your tough guy!" he snapped for the benefit of such as Denny Brod. "He'll be sleepin' for ten minutes."

He caught the top rope and vaulted out

of the ring. There was no pausing for his robe. His feet hit the lawn while volunteer aids were gathering up the defeated Hogan.

He trotted across the grass, his mind filled with thoughts of dressing hurriedly and returning for the plaudits that would make his heart sing before Mildred Eggers.

"Tommy! Tommy!" He knew the voice. Behind him he could hear the patter of running feet. It was Mildred.

Under the shadows of the gentle night he paused. The girl overtook him, and her eyes were wide. Her dainty hand caught his arm, damp with the exertion of fighting.

"My Tommy!" she said, her voice half laughter and half tears. "My wonder man!"

Impelled by an impulse that submerged all his inhibitive senses, Ratigan reached down and caught her in his great arms. The girl sighed happily, then gasped as he crushed her against his massive chest.

"Gee, kid!" Tommy muttered thickly. "I had to do it. I done it for you. I done it because you love strength. I'm strong, Millie—strong as ever a man was—an' I'm goin' to be champ'een of the world some day."

Her face was against his. How soft was her skin! How utterly blissful was this contact with her slender body. Her arms clung to him, and in moments of the wildest joy he felt her lips touch his—once, twice, thrice.

All about them was the peaceful night, yet Tommy was trembling, and he knew that the girl was adrift in a sea of emotion.

"I love you, kid!" he muttered. "I never knowed anybody like you!"

"I love you, too, Tommy! I love you to death. You are so big, so strong, so magnificent! I knew it that time when Denny took me to see you fight. That's why I—wanted you here."

She was laughing, but her eyes were swimming with tears. In her voice there was a note that verged upon hysteria. He held her so close that she gasped again, then he kissed her fear away until she rested contentedly in his arms.

"I'll go an' dress, Millie," he said. "I'll be back then—back to you. Keep away from that guy Brod, will you, please? What did he say to you outside the ring?"

The girl laughed evasively and turned back toward the crowd.

"I'll be waiting, Tommy," she promised. "I'm the happiest girl in the world."

Then he went on, heedless of Hogan or the results of the terrific blow he had dealt the man. Never had Tommy Ratigan known the emotions that gripped him now. His senses were close to reeling.

He did not pause for Kraft. What was a valet to him now? What difference did all the pomp and ceremony of this upper world make to him? After all, he realized, it was only pomp and ceremony. How quickly it dissolved into smoke when the fires of love overtopped its wall of pretense, its artificial barrier.

There was only one world where love controlled. All the conventions that man had been able to erect were swept aside in one moment of love's realization.

Mildred Eggers was his—Millie of that upper world—of the expensive motor cars, the vast home, the flowing conversation, the ultra-refinement, the bowing servants. With one blow of his good right arm he had knocked out all the conventions of generations and brought to this world of plenty the standards of the gas house district.

He plunged under the shower, and was half dressed when Kraft appeared. The valet was still thrilled by what he had seen.

"He's all right now, Tommy," he said, "but I thought at first you had done for him. It was minutes before he batted an eye. Dr. Knowles was there, thank Gawd! He finally got him fixed up, but he'll be dizzy the rest of this year, I bet. What a sock, Tommy!"

There was a deep admiration in the man's tones. His envious eyes watched the play of Tommy's shoulders.

"When I sock 'em," Ratigan said modestly, "they take the full count."

Kraft tried valiantly to assist the fighter in his dressing, but excitement had mastered him. He was all thumbs, and admitted it.

Tommy smiled tolerantly, and dressed himself with the speed of a fireman. He had to get back at once to Mildred. He wondered what she might be doing.

A sense of possession of the girl turned his head a bit. He would tell her that, as his girl, she must keep away from such weaklings as Brod.

Tommy was not the sort, he desired to make clear to her, who could share a wom-

an's affections. She must be all his or he would drop her immediately.

He had finished dressing and was on his way toward the door, when Blandon Eggers appeared at the suite. The banker's eyes were ablaze with wrath. He stopped short and glared at Tommy from beneath his gray and bristling brows.

"Just what the hell you imagine you've done here, young man," he snarled, "I'm sure I don't know. But if you think you can come to my place and batter into helplessness a man who trusted you, you've got another think coming. I'd have you jailed if it wasn't for the unpleasantness involved. Pack your duds and get off this place as fast as your legs will carry you. If I were a few years younger, I'd give you a trouncing you'd remember!"

Tommy stopped as short as had the banker. His combative jaw shot forward.

"You never seen the day you could carry a towel for me, you old walrus!" he shouted. "Whatcha mean, you'd throw me off the place?"

Eggers, realizing the physical danger of further angering the young fighter, whirled about to a writing desk and snatched out his check book. With a hand that trembled he hurriedly drew a check for a thousand dollars and scornfully thrust it into Tommy's grasp.

"There," he said, "is your money, as we agreed. Now go! I have already got rid of that infernal talking machine that you brought with you; sent him in another car. One will be waiting for you."

Then the banker was gone, behind a door that banged. Tommy looked at Kraft and Kraft looked at Tommy.

"What's eatin' that old mutt?" the fighter asked.

"He's a hot tempered man," the valet replied. "I've worked for him a long time. You better go back to town. He doesn't understand prize fighting."

"He'll know a lot more about it if he messes round me much!" Ratigan declared savagely.

But there seemed nothing for him to do but leave. He threw his gear into the valise and went out the door.

He would see Mildred before he left. He would, in fact, refuse to go until he had, although he disliked the thought of making trouble for her.

He was saved any trouble by the prompt appearance of the girl on the stairs. She

was looking for him, and her eyes were misty with tears.

She kissed him and whispered: "Meet me at the end of the drive, Tommy. I'll take you home in my roadster. Don't tell any one."

Then she was gone.

VI

TOMMY RATIGAN, bag in hand, waited at the end of the drive. Presently he saw the glowing headlights of a machine swing into the curve from the direction of the garage. On the pillared porch of the mansion he could see the form of a man in dinner dress, and he recognized Blandon Eggers.

He saw him excitedly wave his arm as the car passed, but the girl did not pause. In a moment the roadster was approaching him, and Tommy stepped out from the hedge.

"Jump in!" Mildred cried. "I don't think father would really mind, but hurry."

Tommy threw his bag into the back of the car and vaulted into the seat. The girl put the lever into second gear and let the clutch in with a jerk.

The car leaped forward into the highway, and Mildred glanced back toward the house. There was no pursuit in sight.

But for several miles she drove at a dangerously rapid pace, and then took a side road which she knew. She now reduced speed, assured that she had shaken off any trailers.

"I hope I didn't do the wrong thing, Tommy," she said earnestly, "but I couldn't let you go like that. Not after—after—"

"After me kissin' you, an' all?" he supplied.

"Yes."

After a brief silence Tommy said: "That old man of yours is a hot sketch. He was talkin' about beatin' me up. Me!"

"Daddy is a jewel, Tommy, but he certainly has a temper. No one could just understand why you struck Hogan so terribly. They knew he was no match for you, and some of the men said you had seen him at the punch bowl and knew that he could not fight his best."

There was a note of inquiry in her remark, and Tommy felt both hurt and angered by it.

"I done it because he had it comin'," he declared stubbornly. "He had it com-

in, an' he got it. I wanted to show your pals that I was all you said I was."

"I knew that." There was pride in her voice now. "I knew you did it for me. But it made them angry. They thought you cowardly."

"Cowardly? Yellow, you mean? Yellow for knockin' a big bum bow-legged?"

There followed another silence, after which the girl laughed softly.

"You would never understand, Tommy," she said; "never in the world. It is all in the point of view."

"That's an old line," he charged. "You've got so used to hangin' round with a lot of lounge cooties that you can't see straight!"

"I don't like you to criticize my friends, Tommy."

"If them's your friends, Millie," he said, "I don't think much of them."

"Nor they of you, Tommy," the girl replied frankly. "It is an age-old problem. I hate it as much as you do, and perhaps I see it a little more clearly than you do—but it doesn't affect my love for you. I do love you, Tommy."

As she spoke she let her right hand drop from the wheel to find his left. Their fingers gripped, and the action stilled the hot words that had come to his lips. There was magic in her touch.

Their pace was slower now, and he could catch the exotic scent of her hair. Against the starlight, aided and abetted by the dash light of the roadster, he worshiped her fine profile.

It thrilled him to recall her finely chiselled lips, and to know that he had kissed them, and that they had kissed him. He thought of the changing lights and colors of her eyes. Her cheeks, flushed with excitement and love of him, were a thing he could never forget.

"I suppose," he said at last, "they think I ain't good enough for 'em."

"Not exactly that, Tommy. You are good enough. But they are different; very different. They have an altered standard of living and reading and thinking and doing. It is so hard to make such things clear."

"I ain't a highbrow; it's that, eh?"

"Well, perhaps that," she admitted frankly, "but not entirely. I would hate to think that any of my friends would not like you because you have had none of life's advantages. I never think of money."

"That's 'cause you don't have to," he said, with more wisdom than he knew. "I admit I wasn't born very close to no silver spoons. But I ain't such a bad guy, at that. Am I?"

Her fingers gripped his very hard again, and she turned her face toward him. It was an invitation, and he kissed her quickly. They both laughed tenderly.

"You have a way about you," she said then; "a swagger, perhaps. You are terribly boastful and self-sufficient, and that may be the reason I love you."

"Boastful?"

"Terribly! I never saw any one so frankly proud of himself."

"Are you kiddin' me?" he demanded.

"Certainly not. I shall expect to hear from you lots of my own failings, Tommy. So I tell you some of yours, occasionally. Two perfect people never could love happily. That proves we are not perfect, I expect. Love, or the greatest joy of it, is in making allowances for the partner's failings. Don't you think so?"

Her philosophy was a little too deep for Tommy. He had again the feeling that this girl knew too much.

She was capable of talking in riddles, and that made him afraid of what he might say. There was no telling where her thoughts were going to lead, and how soon she would have him utterly beyond his depth.

"One of your faults is smokin'," he said. "That, an' wearin' short skirts, and bein' too darn wise for a young girl."

She laughed softly.

"We are back where we started, Tommy; back at the point of view. I think I see yours. I am very certain you do not see mine."

"Then why do you love me, kid?"

"Silly! I just do! No one knows just why they love another, do they?"

"I never thought I could love a girl that smoked cigarettes an' mixed up a punch that 'd knock a crocodile goofy!" he admitted.

"That is a matter of generations, Tommy; of blood. That's it. We are all more or less classified by birth, I think. I've thought a very great deal about it all since I knew I was falling in love with you. It is all very strange. Children are born to grow apart. No one class is necessarily any better than another, but there are classes. We are born classified, if you fol-

low me, and we grow into our classification."

"I'm followin' you," he said shortly.

"That goes on for generations," she continued, "and generations of growth are hard to overcome. That is what puzzles me, dear. One flash of love banishes the centuries."

"Let's not talk about it," he suggested.

"I guess if you love me an' I love you, that old man of yours ain't goin' to bust us up."

She did not answer that. A hint of hopelessness showed in her manner. Once her lips trembled, and the hand Tommy held suddenly was cold.

For a long time the purr of the big motor and the wash of the soft night air about them were the only sounds. Still their hands clung, and a measure of happiness held them in its sway.

"We have a vast problem to solve, Tommy," the girl finally resumed. "The more I think about it, the more I shudder. It will take lots of courage and sacrifice. We must be very understanding. It is not my father I fear. It is for our love."

"Outsiders should keep their mitts off love affairs," Tommy declared with the air of a sage.

After another long silence she took her hand away from his and said: "It is up to us, Tommy. If we are to enjoy the happiness of love we must accommodate ourselves to its requirements. It is not just the first flush of love that counts, it is the long pull through the years."

"You don't need to hang onto me, Millie," the fighter sturdily assured her. "Any time you're tired of me, all you got to do is to say so. I don't love you 'cause you're rich, you know."

"Silly! I guess we have talked enough about it to-night. I will try to make father see things a little more clearly, and I am sure I can. I will be home reasonably early, and perhaps I can talk with him to-night. Shall I see you again soon?"

"Sure. I'm in love with you, Millie. I'd come callin' right at the house for all of that! The old man don't worry me none."

She caught his arm and the car swerved a little.

"Don't say that, Tommy dear," she begged earnestly. "There is so much we must see and do. Let us just let it drop, now."

After that he talked of his previous battles, and grew enthusiastic over his championship possibilities. He went so far as to assure the girl that, once he became champion, they would need none of her father's money. To that she did not reply.

Tommy managed to keep his shoulder against Mildred as she drove the car, and frequently he leaned closer to press his lips against her cheek. He was quite willing to dismiss, for the joys of the moment, all the dire possibilities that filled the mind of the love-stricken girl.

They were happy. At times she answered him almost as might have his mother. At others she laughed heartily when Tommy had not in the least meant to be amusing.

It was that surprise about her which charmed him, he thought. You never knew just what to expect from Millie.

Once in the city, the girl piloted the roadster toward the street where Tommy lived. It never occurred to him that she might be timid about driving through there alone on her return trip. They came to a bouncing stop on the cobbles outside the tenement where he lived.

"This ain't much like your tent, is it?" he asked laughingly.

She merely squeezed his hand the harder by way of answer. There were lights in many of the windows, and Tommy knew that the curious were watching him and the beautiful girl with the gorgeous car. He delayed the parting a little on that account, and when the girl had finally started away he stood on the sidewalk and watched her, his hand waving.

As he mounted the steps toward the gaslit hall Annie Dolan faced him.

"I've been with your mother," she said simply. "She was alone and asked me to come in to see her."

"Oh, hello, Annie!" Tommy responded. "Got over your huff yet?"

"I have never been angry with you, Tommy," the girl replied. "But I don't want to stand in your way."

"Oh, ho!" he laughed. "So you seen my little friend, huh? A peach! See that car? They got a dozen better'n that one. I been trailin' with an outfit that 'd knock your eye out, Annie! I'm headed fer big things."

There were sudden tears in Annie's eyes, and she darted around Tommy and down the steps. She did not permit him to walk

to her door with her. When he looked after her she was still running, and halfway home.

"Well, what the hell!" he mused. "I never seen things as nutty as women. She's jealous, I guess. What 'll she be when she hears me an' Millie is goin' to get spliced an' live on that farm down there on Long Island? Oh, boy!"

Then he mounted the rickety stairs and entered his home. His mother was waiting for him, and he saw that she peered anxiously into his face. He told her at once of his fine time among the rich people, and the manner in which he had acquitted himself with Knock-Out Hogan.

The wise old woman listened for a long time in silence. Then she said:

"Folks like them ain't our kind, Tommy. Better off you'd be with little Annie Dolan that loves the ground you walk on an' would make a home for you an' give you children you could be proud of. It's your own mother that knows best about that, my boy!"

"Annie's all right," Tommy admitted, "an' I like her fine, but you don't savvy what this new play is. This Millie is different. She's a wow! An' she's got money to throw away an' never miss it. She loves me, too. Her old man ain't so good, but I'll fix him."

"That's just it, Tommy. They're different. Better you stay among your own people an' build up a home for your later years. People like that would soon start laughin' at the manners of the likes of you!"

It appeared queer to Tommy that his mother should have struck upon that particular angle. He well knew that they already had laughed at his manners. It was something of that sort at which Mildred had hinted on their ride into town.

His own impulse was to cast all these matters to the winds, and let love straighten them out. And he disliked being told of the difference between Mildred and himself.

He recalled that Mildred had used the word classified. She said all children were born in classes, and half confessed that it might be better to stick to class even though love itself ruled otherwise.

He could not quite grasp the magnitude of the problem. But he saw that others did, and when he went to his room the fact impressed itself upon him.

He compared his small, unattractive quarters with those he had enjoyed so briefly at the Eggers's wonderful mansion. Resentment gripped him.

Strange as that other world had been, he combated the thought of giving it up. Much as he had sneered at the fine manners of the young men guests, he wished now that he was like them; he envied them the very things at which he had sneered.

In his ears rang the words of his toil-worn mother: "Better you stick to your own kind an' have a home an' children."

Tommy had never before thought of himself as a father. He found it extremely difficult to associate slender little Millie with the trials and problems and sacrifices of motherhood.

VII

THE next two weeks were almost a daze to Tommy Ratigan. He saw Mildred Eggers oftener than he did Annie Dolan. The girl from the upper realm came openly in her roadster, and braved the stares of Tommy's neighbors.

There were long afternoon rides in the fine car; experiences that were to Tommy a perfect revelation. Sometimes the girl was radiantly happy, and at others she was somber and appeared worried by thoughts which she kept to herself.

Adroitly she taught Tommy something of the art of manners and the refinements of speech. With a deftness that could not be offensive to him, she insisted that he forego his double negatives, that he talk less of himself, that he yield to others a responsible place with full and individual rights.

Tommy responded rapidly to the lessons. They would laugh in delight each time that he misspoke and quickly corrected himself. They played at the game of love as might children, and the fighter appeared quite content to accept the guidance of the girl.

He never spoke again about her father. He had a vast confidence in Millie, and was certain that she could handle that part of their affair better than he.

It was, therefore, a great surprise to Ratigan when he received a letter from the banker. It was a brief one addressed to him at his home, and asked that he call at the bank.

Tommy, seeing no reason why he should not go, went there at the appointed hour.

He was somewhat awed by the splendor of the place and the ordered activity about him.

He was led promptly into the private office of Blandon T. Eggers, and there the banker awaited him. The older man's lips were set in a straight and stern line, his eyes were cold and hard.

"Hello, Ratigan!" he said gruffly. "Take a chair."

Tommy sank into a huge leather thing that might have served as a bed, so luxurious was its upholstery. The banker swung about to a high backed chair behind a great desk.

"I suppose," he said, as he seated himself and glared straight into Tommy's eyes, "that you know the purpose of this visit?"

"I got your letter, that's all," Ratigan answered. "Mebbe you thought I was afraid to come down here?"

Eggers did not answer at once. He leaned over and opened a humidor which stood on the desk. From it he selected a fat cigar, waving to Tommy to do likewise. The fighter declined.

"I presume I should have known that nicotine is not in the curriculum of prize fighters," the banker remarked.

"I don't know what the hell you mean," Tommy snapped, "but I don't smoke."

There was an air about the older man that angered him, although he was striving to control himself for Mildred's sake.

"I did not expect you would," Eggers returned evenly, "but I had no idea you would be afraid to come down here. Drop that thought from your mind. The truth is, I feel that I have only anticipated your call by a few days. My thought is that such things are better done promptly."

"I wouldn't call on you if you was the last bimbo alive," Tommy assured him frankly. "I ain't got any use for you, Mr. Eggers. We never could pal around much!"

"Quite right!" Eggers agreed. His voice did not raise in tone, nor did the expression of his set features alter in the slightest degree. "All of which, Ratigan, makes it clearer that you have no ambition to be my son-in-law. Why, then, bother my little daughter? Why follow her? There could be only one motive, and that is the thing I have called you here to talk over."

"I ain't followin' her. She's followin' me!" Tommy declared, sitting erect in his

deep chair and glowering at the older man. The fighter was becoming annoyed.

"It comes to the same thing, Ratigan. You see to it that she does. Mildred is headstrong and young, and rather tired of the round of social affairs which she has had to call fun. Romance has gripped her, and you happen to be the cause of it. The affair has got to stop, as both of us know."

"I don't think you're much of a stopper, Mr. Eggers," Tommy said coolly.

"I am not unschooled in the ways of men, and I'm ready and willing to talk money, Ratigan," the banker went on frowningly. "That is what you and that wordy manager of yours are thinking about, of course. Let's have your proposition. I'll accept or decline in two seconds. I have made up my mind how far I'll go."

It took Tommy a few seconds to realize just what the gray-haired man was proposing. When it did seep into his mind that Eggers was proposing to buy him off, he was more surprised than angry. Such a thought as this had never entered his mind.

All the words of Millie and his mother on the matter of class surged into his brain in a tumult. His strong hands gripped the wide arm of the chair, and he gazed numbly into the banker's eyes.

"Well," Eggers urged complacently, "are you not in a position to speak? Must you talk this over with that word-mangling manager of yours? I presume he is in on all your transactions."

"S'posin'," Tommy managed to say in a suddenly discovered calmness, "I'm figurin' on marryin' Millie. What then? The only reason I ain't all set to do it is you, you old walrus! I never want a sap like you in my family!"

He arose from his chair, his gaudy cap caught between trembling fingers. "Class"—that was it. And here it was again rearing its hideous head in the realms of true love! He hated the rich man for what he had said, yet it did not occur to him that his own honor had been directly attacked.

"That would not change things in the least," Eggers insisted. "Such a thing as you mention is sacrilege. It could not be. Mildred herself would realize that. But there may be gossip if this goes on, and I am ready to do my part to be quit of the thing."

"Your part is to go to hell!" Tommy said bitterly. "I bet Millie don't know about your buttin' into her affairs. I'm

goin' to tell her, too, the next time I see her. An' I'm goin' to let her know just what I told you."

He whirled toward the door to leave, and the banker, although he did not rise from his chair, stopped him with a word. There was an arresting quality in the older man's voice.

"Wait!" he said. "We are not done with this talk yet. If you think that I have brought you here to compromise you in a blackmail scheme, I'll give you my word that not another soul on earth can hear a word we say. You are quite safe in speaking your mind frankly. I never break my word."

"I'll speak it," Tommy retorted, "just like I did before. You can go to hell. I'd never be the kind of a father you are. Money won't ever buy or sell the happiness of a kid of mine."

He stormed through the doorway and out of the bank. Blandon Eggers made no attempt to stop him again.

Tommy had gained the street before a coherent thought passed through his mind. He waved at a taxicab and, as he stood waiting, the uniformed doorman of the bank came to him.

"Hello, Tommy," he said cordially. "I remember you from the other day when you come down in the car."

"And you," Tommy snarled, "can go to hell, too. Go along with that big cheat of a Blandon T. Eggers you got inside!"

The doorman promptly turned and stepped toward the safety of the foyer. Tommy leaped into the cab and ordered the driver to take him home.

When they turned into the cobblestone street Tommy was happily surprised to see Mildred's roadster standing before his house. A second glance showed him that she was waiting at the wheel, and his own mother was beside the car and talking with the girl.

Tommy was glad. To know Mildred was to love her. His mother would be rid of her insane objections, and Tommy would cease to hear of Annie Dolan and future homes and children.

He went directly to the roadster and took the girl's hand. A glance at her face sufficed to show him that all was not well.

His mother said: "You come home a bit too soon, my boy. I was after talkin' with this sweet girl about you."

"This is Millie," Tommy explained,

"the gal I been tellin' you all about, ma."

"I know it. I been tellin' her that she's makin' a great mistake, an' so are you. We ain't her kind. She ain't ours. Better, I been tellin' her, that she don't come here no more, Tommy."

"She'll come here as long as I want her to!" he retorted angrily. "I can't see why everybody's got to butt into our business. I just seen your old man, Millie, an' he tried to pay me not to see you again."

Up to that moment the girl had been humble. Now she sat suddenly erect in her seat; her face went white, then red.

"What are you saying, Tommy?" she asked tensely.

He dug into his pocket and withdrew the letter he had received from Eggers. This he thrust into her hand, and as the girl read it her hands clenched hard about the margin of the paper.

"I just come from seein' the old walrus," Tommy growled. "He asked me how much I wanted to let you alone, an' I told him to go to hell. I'll be tellin' other folks that if they keep hornin' in on my business."

"Now, Tommy—" his mother began.

"Right now, I'm tellin' you this, ma," he interrupted. "I'm movin' to a place of my own where folks will mind their business. I won't be back. But you can bet on this: Millie an' me 'll be married just as soon as I'm champ'een."

He jumped into the roadster, and the girl, her face burning with shame, slipped the gears into mesh and started the car away. His mother stood on the curb and they heard very clearly her last words:

"You'll be comin' back, my boy," she said. "You been tellin' Annie Dolan you'd marry her as soon as you was champ'een."

The car rounded the corner and headed for Central Park. There, on the wide boulevards amid a throng of heedless people in automobiles, the two found words.

"I ain't goin' back, Millie," Tommy said. "Never! I'm goin' to win the champ'enship, an' then we'll get married."

A sudden determination showed in Mildred Eggers's face. Her voice, when she answered, carried a note that Tommy had never heard there.

"Good! I will marry you, Tommy dear. We'll both have a lot to put up with, but I love you, and I believe you love

me. I will make you as good a wife as I know how, dear."

"Sure you will; you'll make a peach, Millie. Just as soon as I can get this champ in a ring I'll knock him bow-legged, an' we'll step off together."

"It strikes me as just as bad," Mildred said slowly, a deep hurt in her voice, "to buy a daughter as to sell one!"

"Aw, never mind that!" Tommy consoled her. "What if he is your old man? He's been countin' dough so long he can't think of nothin' else."

"No," the girl went on steadily, "nothing else—not even of me. That has decided me, Tommy. I love you. Why, I do not know, and sometimes I wish devoutly that I did not. But now I am determined."

"Me, too, kid!" Ratigan announced.

"Then, if you want me, I will marry you, Tommy. We will let it rest at that. In the meantime I shall say nothing to father unless he brings up the subject with me. It is easy to see that we have been watched. Very well, let them spy. I am not in the least ashamed of my love. I am proud of it—proud as I have never been proud before."

Heedless of the passing traffic, Tommy leaned close and kissed her cheek. Thus they sealed the bargain.

"I'll want you, all right!" he laughed. "I'll get that champ in a ring and knock him loose from his senses, that's what I'll do. Then we'll be all set."

"Are you going home, Tommy?"

"I am not! I'll go to a hotel. And I'll make Shorty steam up this champ'enship match. We'll show 'em, Millie. I sure love you, sweetheart!"

"Who is Annie Dolan?" she asked suddenly.

"A girl I've knowed all my life. She lives down the street from me, an' ever since I was a kid we been foolin' about bein' in love—but there's nothin' to it."

Mildred watched him closely as he spoke, and observed that he did not meet her eyes.

"Could I meet her some time?" she asked.

"What for? Annie ain't like you. She's a nice girl an' all that; there ain't a better one on earth, but she's slow an'—an'—well, she ain't got the brain an' the style that you have."

He caught her hand in an attempt to

divert the talk. Deep within he was uneasy about Annie. She was all that he said of her, and then some more.

He hated the thought of hurting Annie. The words of his mother came to his mind. The girl really did love him.

But all kids have wounds of the heart. And they heal quickly and are forgotten, or laughed at, in later years of happiness.

"But I would like to meet her," Mildred insisted.

"I don't see why!" Tommy objected testily.

"I would like to meet lots of your friends, Tommy."

"No, you wouldn't, either. You wouldn't like 'em. They ain't like you; they ain't got your class."

After their ride Mildred dropped Tommy at the Hotel Bardsley, where he intended to live. He bade her good-by at the curb. There was no possibility of his missing the tenseness which showed in her face and voice.

"We will say nothing to any one of your talk with father," she warned him. "We shall simply keep quiet. But don't forget, dear; I love you. And when you win the championship, if you will come to me and tell me that you still want me, I will marry you. I am absolutely determined on that. Nothing will ever change me, Tommy!"

VIII

So matters stood through the passing of two months. Each day Mildred and Tommy met, and the girl's determination to stand by her decision increased.

Once she hinted that Denny Brod had asked her hand in marriage for at least the dozenth time, and, upon her refusal, had complained that it was because of Tommy. There had followed, as near as Tommy could judge, an urging on the young society man's part that she should not throw herself away on a prize fighter.

Again, Blandon Eggers announced his intention of leaving for an extended tour of Europe in company with his daughter. This plan Mildred saw through, and promptly negatived.

She had grown very thoughtful with the passing of the weeks; almost morose. Her attitude was almost that of martyrdom.

Then, out of a clear sky, word came that Shorty Welch had secured a chance at the championship for Tommy Ratigan. The papers for the match were drawn and signed promptly, and the date was set.

On the day that the newspapers announced the match, Tommy was deluged with calls at the hotel, and letters and telegrams came to him literally in bundles. Many clubs and managers wanted his services in case of victory.

Mildred called him on the telephone, and said that she was infinitely happy now that the longed for chance was at hand, and just as certain that he would emerge from the battle a champion. Tommy assured her that he would.

"We both been waitin' for this shot," he told her happily. "I'll spill that bum an' cop a title that 'll be worth half a million bucks. You an' me for the main aisle as soon as the bout's over, Millie!"

Tommy undertook a course of rigorous training. He could not see Mildred as often as before, but consoled himself with the thought that, once the fight was behind him, he would have her all day every day, as long as they lived.

It was at the training gymnasium that he saw Annie Dolan for the first time in weeks. She was there with a friend and neighbor of Tommy's, and her eyes were filled with pride as she watched him work on the pulleys and the punching bag. Then Tommy donned the gloves with three sparring partners, and cuffed them before his attack as a gale might scatter leaves.

Tommy was a little constrained before Annie. He might have pretended not to see her had she not waited for him after he had completed his training work. He still wore boxing gloves when she reached him, and one of these she caught in both her hands and looked up into his eyes.

"I had to tell you that I'm awful happy over that bout with the champion," Annie said. "I just had to come and tell you that, Tommy. I know you'll win, and I hope so more than most anything else."

She did not give him time to answer. When she had spoken she whirled on her heel and caught the arm of the lad who had escorted her. Tommy looked after her, a strange feeling gripping at his heart, his eyes noting the liteness of her figure and the beauty of her face.

There was something striking about Annie's eyes, he knew. Mildred's were flashing and bright and beautiful, and they seemed to change color with each of her thoughts, but Annie's were deep.

That was it, deep. Their depths might never be plumbed, and they were calm and

restful. Annie was a grand girl, there was no doubting that.

And his own mother had said that she loved the very ground he walked on. He was sorry for that, because, after all, she was old enough to know her own mind, Annie was. And she might be very unhappy with all that love unrequited.

When he had won the belt, and Millie and himself had married, he would let Annie meet Millie, and then she would understand. But not before the marriage. What good could come of that?

Annie did not come to see him again. He seldom heard of her, but frequently she entered his mind, and he was always very sorry for her. It depressed him to think that she was unhappy. Why couldn't every one be happy?

The training grind drew to a close. The big battle was only a few days off. Tommy was in perfect condition, ready to make the fight of his life. To him, all that remained was to enter the ring and emerge a champion.

How happy Millie would be! How he could laugh into the face of old Blandon Eggers!

And there would be a wide public interest in the marriage of a champion to such a girl as Mildred. Every one would want to meet them. They might even have as fine a place on Long Island as Millie was used to. Anyway, they could see; he would win and marry—after that, let come what would.

Shorty bustled about town, the image of self-satisfaction and fairly bursting with his own importance. He gave interviews that sometimes were not printed, but he enjoyed the talking none the less.

Two days before the great battle, Shorty and Tommy went into the country to rest and taper down to that perfection that should mark a man's condition at bell time. Just before he left, Tommy arranged for two seats at the edge of the ring.

Magnanimously he had agreed that Denny Brod might escort Mildred to the fight. She could not come alone, and Tommy wanted her to see him scale the heights of fame so that she might never forget what a man she had married.

On the afternoon of the bout, Ratigan and Welch returned to the city. The fighter weighed in at the boxing club, then went to his hotel room.

There he telephoned to Mildred for her

words of encouragement and love. After that he went to bed and fell into an untroubled sleep, from which he did not arouse until Shorty came to him at nine that night.

He waked to a realization that in slightly more than an hour he would be facing the champion and reaching forth to grasp for himself fame and fortune. Curiously, and boyishly, he thought again of the champion he had seen in his youth, that man who had spoken to him from the observation platform of the express.

He promised himself that he would ride that express some day soon, and stand on the platform as it ran by the old freight house. He hoped that some kid might be standing there to whom he could call out a condescending hello.

He dressed as Shorty packed the bag in which they carried their ring gear. A taxi was waiting at the service entrance of the hotel.

Tommy was ushered out that way so that he might avoid the crowd anxious to catch a glimpse of him. He told himself that, after the fight, he would enter the front way and let the people see him.

At the club he dressed and was ready, his hands bandaged and his face greased, well before bell time. A great impatience was upon him. He wanted to get started on this fight that meant everything to him.

As he marched down the aisle toward the distant ring under a canopy of white lights, a thunderous ovation greeted him. It was still roaring its welcome when he clambered through the ropes and waved his hands in greeting and response.

Across the ring the champion was busy arranging himself in his corner, and Tommy crossed over and shook him by the hand. He pitied this king about to lose his crown.

Back in his corner, he glanced downward to the ringside seats, and found the bright eyes of Mildred Eggers. A thrill shot through him, and he was warmed to the task at hand. Brod, at her side, appeared less happy in extending a smile and nod of encouragement.

The two fighters met in the center of the ring for brief instructions. There was no false geniality between them. Tommy plainly showed that he was in there to give his all, and to wrest the title from the champion or perish in the attempt.

The champion had an expression of like

import. His jaw was set, his eyes steady and cold. And in his corner, a sneer on his face, was Knock-Out Hogan, who hated Tommy Ratigan with good reason.

In the corner, just before the bell, Tommy glanced again to Mildred. Her eyes were shining, but her cheeks were pale with an anxiety he did not feel himself.

He smiled confidently to her and jokingly worked his heavy shoulders for her benefit. She loved strength, he knew; she loved a fighter—a champion.

At the clang of the bell Tommy charged across the ring with the ferocious rush of a maddened bull. He swung a terrific right, but the champion slipped the blow and gave ground. They rushed against the ropes, and Tommy shot both hands to the body with a double thud that brought a shout from the crowd.

The champion rolled on the ropes, weaved clear, and retreated. Ratigan was after him with a rush. They met in ring center, and the champion's elbow collided fiercely with Tommy's face.

That "accident" was followed instantly by a crushing right-hand blow to the ear. Tommy crashed to the floor, but was up before the timer could start a count.

He was surprised. He had not seen that elbow, and had been unable to gauge the darting right of the champion.

A smile played about Ratigan's lips. He wanted to assure every one that he had not been hurt; that the knock-down was a fluke.

But the champion quickly erased the smile. Tommy met such a flurry of darting blows as he never had imagined possible. Many of them crashed against his face and head. He fought back with every ounce of fighting power he had, but the battering went on.

Toward the middle of the round the spectators had risen in their seats and were cheering and yelling with maudlin excitement. Just before the bell, the champion sunk a short right hook against the heart, a shock which Tommy felt over all his being.

A queer lassitude assailed him, and he felt his knees buckling under him. He saw faintly the swinging right of the champion, but could do nothing to avoid it.

The blow crashed against his chin. The lights overhead whirled and assumed colorful rays in place of the steady white glare he had seen there before.

He did not hear the bell. The first realization he had of things mundane was the frantic working of Shorty Welch, back in his corner. It dawned upon him that he had been dragged there, saved from defeat by the clanging of the bell ending the round.

"Take time," Shorty was imploring him. "Take time, Tommy. Don't go swappin' punches with that guy. He's a champ'een, not a palooka. Box him! Keep away! Use a straight left an' keep him off you."

In the far distance the bell rang again and Tommy staggered upward. Before he could move, the champion was upon him, and that ripping, rending, battering series of punches showered his head again. Ratigan was driven back into the ropes by the fury of the attack, and it dawned on him that defeat was engulfing him.

The force of the champion's rush swept Tommy into the ropes and out through them. He gained a brief respite as the referee dragged him back into the ring. He heard the gleeful shouts of Knock-Out Hogan from the champion's corner:

"Get him, champ! Get him!"

Tommy's dazed mind wandered to the girl outside the ring. He saw the collapse of all their glorious plans, the canceling of his marriage and his riches.

Into his distorted thought flashed a vision of that other champion on the observation platform. Now was the time to fight for all that he held dear in life. Now was the time to convince himself that he was a champion.

Free of the ropes, Ratigan growled a curse on his tormentor and began to fight with the fury of a tiger. No longer was he just a professional fighter. He had become a superman driven by every impulse of love and ambition. He simply would not go down; he would not be beaten before this girl whom victory would give him to have and to hold.

The champion backed away slowly and easily avoided Tommy's maddened efforts. He poised himself lightly on his toes and permitted the battered challenger to follow him. Drama gripped the crowd. The champion only waited a favorable opening—and the spectators knew.

Once the champion's right shot forth with cruelty in its purpose. Somehow, not even Tommy knew how, the punch landed wild. It struck Tommy's shoulder and whirled him half around. But he swung to

the attack again, and once more the champion backed away.

There was a superb grace in the champion's retreat. His face had relaxed some of its grimness; he was waiting for a certainty—the chance to drive that killing right squarely to Tommy Ratigan's jaw.

And he was willing to await the right chance. Time and again it appeared that the finishing punch must start, yet the champion still danced back and bided his opportunity.

Tommy was gaining in strength. He had straightened up and, although his face was bloody, his legs were steadier and his efforts not so wild.

A degree of confidence came to him, and he fought on not quite so blindly. He set himself, feinted with his left, then drove out with his right for the body.

The blow landed, and the champion staggered back. A wild cry from the rabid crowd urged Tommy on, and a sense of exultation came to him. He feinted again, and stepped in with another right.

At that instant the champion fired the blow for which all the crowd had been waiting. Straight and true it went to Ratigan's chin.

This time the lights did not falter above him. There was only a single flash of blinding red to his sight, a violent twisting of the floor under his feet, then a sea of darkness which swept entirely over him.

The referee was above Ratigan as he sprawled across the floor. The official's hand arose and fell as the fatal ten seconds sped by.

In his corner the champion was reaching for his bathrobe. He knew that there would be no rising from that last blow.

So did a pale-faced, tight-lipped girl who stood on her chair just at the edge of the ring and gazed, amazed and stricken, at the defeated form of her sweetheart.

IX

TOMMY RATIGAN hated the return to consciousness. A mighty shame swept over him in defeat.

He felt that he could not meet men face to face. The fact that his best had been too little, weighed nothing in his thoughts. He had given his best and fought with the courage and the fury of a tiger.

But he had lost. It was not in him to be a champion, and none knew that better than Tommy himself.

The march to his dressing room along the aisle of disaster was a torture to him. He held his robe high about his neck, and kept his eyes on the floor. The door of the dressing room was a welcome sight to him.

Shorty tried to speak, but there was nothing to be said. In a matter of four fighting minutes the dreams and hopes and castles of a lifetime had been shattered by the fists of a man who was that which Tommy Ratigan was not—a champion.

The beaten man stretched out on a rubbing bench, face down. He rested his battered eyes on his forearm, and tears came, blinding tears that welled from his very soul.

He paid no heed when the door opened. Then a tender hand caressed his shoulder, and then he looked up.

Mildred Eggers was there, and behind her stood Denny Brod.

"I lost!" Tommy exclaimed hoarsely, wonderingly, as though it was a mystery that he could not explain. "He beat me—in a little over a round."

"It makes no difference, Tommy, dear," Mildred said softly. "You fought with all you had. It need not change things, dear."

Very gently she stroked his forehead and gazed down into his eyes.

"I ain't a champ'een," he said humbly. "I thought I was, an' I ain't!"

"There are other things even better than championships," Mildred consoled him.

"Not for me!" he declared. "I'm a fighter, an' nothin' else, Millie. I got to be a fighter. It's in my blood. An' I ain't a champ'een!"

"It's all right, old man," Denny Brod interjected, catching at Tommy's hand. "You fought a good fight. That's the way of a man. Some one must lose, old chap. It isn't so much the score as the way the game was played, you know."

Ratigan could find no answer to that. It struck him as another of those inexplicable things from that other world—that world which had so suddenly crashed about him.

The door opened again, and Shorty brought Annie Dolan to Tommy's side. He looked at her and found a smile on her face.

She came to him, leaned down and kissed a bruise on his cheek.

Then she spread his robe closely about

him and ordered the manager to bring warm water and fresh towels and plaster for the cuts. She was immensely efficient.

No words of condolence came from her, but Tommy Ratigan sensed that here was a girl of his own kind, and that she was suffering even more than he was. Here was the sort of woman who became the mother of a champion!

"Is this," Mildred asked slowly, "Annie Dolan?"

"Yes," Annie answered. "Tommy and I are old friends. You are the lady from Long Island, I guess."

"I am Mildred Eggers."

There was a deep catch in the society girl's voice.

"And I hope that we can be friends, Annie," she added.

"Of course," Annie assured her, at the same time reaching for the basin Shorty had brought. "You are Tommy's girl, I know. Of course we can be friends."

Then she set about bathing the battered face of the fighter while Mildred watched her silently. There was a motherliness about Annie's treatment of Tommy that spoke volumes.

She had prayed that he could be such a champion as he had seen that day from the freight platform. That had been their secret—his boyish ambition.

"You love him, too," Mildred said suddenly.

"Of course I do," Annie replied frankly.

"I always have."

"An' I love her, Millie!" Tommy declared impetuously. "I guess she's my kind. Classes don't mix good, everybody says. But neither of you has got to marry me anyhow, 'cause I ain't a champ'een."

"That would make no difference to either, I am very sure," Mildred said in strained tone.

"But it does to me, Millie," Tommy said fiercely. "I see it all, now. I never could be like you, an' you never could be like me. Annie will know what makes me satisfied, an' if she still wants me—"

"Of course I do, Tommy," Annie said stoutly.

Tommy Ratigan looked helplessly at Mildred for a moment. Then Denny Brod stepped to her side and slipped his arm through hers. A light of hope was in his face.

"Kind to kind, that's it," Tommy went on, now shamefacedly. "There's fight in

my blood, Millie, an' there ain't in yours. An' if we got married an' had a son he might be like those people down on Long Island. I don't want that, Millie, honest I don't. I want a fightin' kid for mine."

Annie blushed, but went on with her steady bathing of his hurts. Mildred smiled slowly.

"You are right, Tommy," she said evenly. "After all, daddy need not have interfered. We can always be friends."

"Indeed, yes!" Denny Brod exclaimed happily. "Perhaps Mildred will give me some hope now."

He glanced at the girl, and she met his gaze squarely.

"Denny," Mildred said smilingly. "You are a good sport. Of course you may hope!"

Then she went to Annie Dolan and slipped her arms around her. They both smiled to each other and Mildred kissed Annie. She kissed Tommy, too, in a sudden burst of friendliness.

"We must all be friends," Mildred said warmly. "You will come to see us. I

imagine daddy has learned some of the things about Tommy that I already knew. And this will convince him that he is not quite so much after all—and neither is his daughter!"

"And I say," Denny Brod said gayly, "a fellow doesn't go on forever in this fight game, you know. When you are ready to tackle something else, it can be arranged quite nicely. I feel I owe you a good deal, old man."

He grabbed Tommy's hand again and shook it warmly. Then he smilingly led Mildred from the room, leaving Annie and Tommy alone.

"Shorty got me a ticket," the girl explained.

"I'm glad, Annie. You saw me lose, so I won't have to tell you about it."

"I didn't see you lose, Tommy. I saw you fight!" she declared loyally.

His arms went around her. Defeat faded into the darkness of forgotten things and on the horizon of their inner vision appeared, perhaps, the coming champion that Annie might give him.

THE END

THE VAGABOND

When Winter's rule is ended,
When Springtime skies are blue;
Who wouldn't be a vagabond,
With not a thing to do?
Where violets are springing,
Where orioles are winging,
Where nightingales are singing,
The glades and copes through.

When showers are lightly falling,
When Springtime glads the land,
Who wouldn't be a vagabond,
With joy on every hand?
Where grasses green are growing,
Where winds are softly blowing,
A benison bestowing,
On all who understand.

When rivulets are laughing,
And Springtime sunbeams play,
Who wouldn't be a vagabond
Along a sylvan way?
Where not a grief is hinted,
Where faith is newly minted,
Where life is pleasure glinted
And all the world is gay.

L. Mitchell Thornton